



DEMOCRACY

Declaration vote counting module



AEC

Australian Electoral Commission

MODULE

Declaration vote counting



This module tasks students to conduct a preliminary scrutiny of provisional and postal ballots. DemocraBot guides learners through an entitlement and enrolment check where students must engage with authentic AEC processes, including checking the details on voter envelopes. Learners are then guided through an outposted centre where they are witness to envelopes being opened and the start of fresh scrutiny.



Learning outcomes

By the end of the first module, students will:

- Recall the AEC provides declaration votes as a means to increase accessibility.
- Recall that the AEC checks the entitlement of voters to make a declaration vote
- Recall instances where a declaration vote will be issued.



Suggested extension application activities:

UNIT OF WORK: Beyond the ballot box – Exploring declaration voting

The linked unit includes these suggested learning activities

- Students assume the role of election consultants, public educators, or policy analysts to explore the purpose of declaration voting and how it facilitates electoral access.



Key questions

1. How do declaration votes help increase accessibility and participation in elections?

Answer: They allow eligible voters who cannot be found on the electoral roll to affirm their eligibility and cast a vote which ensures broader inclusion in the democratic process.



Beyond the ballot box – exploring declaration voting

**DEMOCRACY MODULE**

Counting declaration votes

**KEY CONCEPT**

Citizenship

**RELATED CONCEPTS**

- **Participation** – systems that enable inclusive access to voting.
- **Processes** – electoral procedures and checks.
- **Equity of access** – Ensuring fairness and rights for all eligible voters.



Overarching questions

How does declaration voting support electoral participation in Australian elections?

Inquiry questions:

Factual – What is declaration voting and when is it used in Australia?

Conceptual – How do voting procedures affect the integrity and inclusivity of elections?



Learning outcomes

By the end of the activities, students will:

- Explain the role of declaration votes in ensuring voters have a range of options for casting their vote.
- Communicate civic understanding through reports, strategy proposals, or campaign messaging.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current declaration voting methods in providing access while maintaining integrity.



Suggested extension learning experiences and activities:

Students assume the role of election consultants, public educators, or policy analysts. They will:

- Explore the purpose, process and implications of declaration voting in Australia. For more information: [Understanding Declaration Voting in Australia-supporting resource for teachers](#).
- Assess the role of declaration voting in ensuring electoral access while safeguarding trust and integrity in the process.

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- Design a policy, recommendation, or public information campaign to improve accessibility, accuracy, or voter confidence.
- Present via infographic, written policy brief, video pitch, or community flyer—tailored to the intended audience.



Beyond the ballot box - Suggested assessment rubric

Criteria	Level 1-2	Level 3-4	Level 5-6	Level 7-8
Criterion A: Knowing and understanding Describes the purpose, process, and context of declaration voting in Australia.	Demonstrates limited understanding; uses few relevant terms or concepts.	Demonstrates basic understanding with some relevant information and terminology.	Demonstrates sound understanding with accurate descriptions and civic relevance.	Demonstrates thorough understanding with insightful connections across process, purpose, and democratic context.
Criterion B: Investigating Explores electoral access, voter legitimacy, and challenges using evidence.	Investigates superficially; limited analysis or source use.	Investigates with some structure; uses partially relevant sources or examples.	Investigates effectively; interprets data or scenarios to draw thoughtful conclusions.	Investigates comprehensively; evaluates implications with well-supported reasoning and impartial evidence.
Criterion C: Communicating Presents findings and strategy clearly and appropriately for task and audience.	Communication lacks clarity, organisation, or appropriate format.	Communicates with some structure; presentation meets basic expectations.	Communicates effectively with clear organisation, format, and civic terminology.	Communicates persuasively, demonstrating structure, accuracy, and audience awareness through strategy or campaign.
Criterion D: Thinking critically Evaluates declaration voting's role in electoral access and legitimacy; proposes improvements.	Offers limited evaluation; ideas may be underdeveloped or unsupported.	Reflects with some insight; proposals may lack depth or feasibility.	Evaluates thoughtfully with reasoned recommendations grounded in evidence.	Evaluates critically and impartially; presents innovative, feasible, and well-supported improvements with civic awareness.





EXPLAINER

Understanding Declaration Voting in Australia – supporting resource for teachers

A briefing on purpose, process, and implications according to AEC guidelines

1. Purpose of Declaration Voting

Declaration voting exists to uphold the principle of universal suffrage, the right to vote, in Australia's compulsory voting system. It ensures that eligible voters who are not able to cast an ordinary vote at their designated polling place on election day can still participate in federal elections.

Key reasons declaration voting is used:

- Voter is outside their enrolled division (absent voting)
- Voter is overseas or interstate
- Voter is unable to attend polling places due to illness, disability, or remoteness
- Voter needs to vote early (pre-poll or postal)
- Voter requires anonymity (e.g. silent electors)
- This mechanism supports electoral inclusion and accessibility, particularly for mobile populations and those facing barriers to in-person voting.

2. Process of Declaration Voting

Declaration votes are cast using a special envelope that includes a voter declaration to confirm their eligibility. The process varies slightly depending on the type:

Type of declaration vote	Description
Postal Vote	Voter applies in advance and receives their ballot papers by mail. They must complete the declaration and return before the deadline to be counted.
Pre-Poll Vote	A vote before election day at designated early voting centres. If the voter is outside their enrolled electoral division, it is treated as declaration vote.
Absent Vote	Cast on election day at a polling place outside the voter's enrolled electoral division.
Provisional Vote	Used when a voter's name cannot be found on the certified list (the electoral roll).
Silent Elector Vote	For voters whose address is protected it ensures anonymity.



Processing steps:

1. Voter completes ballot papers and declaration envelope.
Ballot papers are placed inside the envelope to maintain secrecy of the vote.
2. AEC verifies the declaration against the electoral roll.
3. Once validated, the envelope is opened, and the ballot papers are included in the count.
4. Invalid or incomplete declarations cannot be included in the count.

This process is governed by the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, which outlines strict procedures to ensure integrity and transparency.

3. Implications for Electoral Integrity and Administration

While declaration voting enhances accessibility, it introduces several challenges:

Administrative Complexity

- Declaration votes require manual verification and handling.
- Counting can be delayed, often continuing for days after polling.
- Increases cost and workload for electoral authorities.

Ballot Secrecy Concerns

- Postal votes are cast outside controlled environments, which could have potential ballot paper secrecy or voter coercion risks.

Rising Usage and Reform Pressure

- Growth in declaration voting reflects societal shifts (mobility, convenience).
- AEC has proposed reforms, such as treating in-division pre-poll votes as ordinary votes to streamline processing.

Civic and Educational Relevance

Declaration voting is a vital tool for electoral inclusion, but its complexity makes it a rich topic for civic education.

Exploring it can:

- Highlight the balance between access and integrity
- Encourage informed participation
- Foster understanding of electoral logistics and reform debates

Sources and Further Reading

- [AEC Research Report on Declaration Voting](#)



