DEMOCRACITY

Distribution of preferences module

AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

Distribution of preferences

Approximate play time

15 minutes

👍 **This module is excellent to learn about election night and for pairing with a class election.**

Students are transported to an AEC count centre where they help to conduct a distribution of preferences. Distribution of preferences is the process of excluding House of Representative candidates with the least number of votes and transferring those votes to other candidates. Through this process a candidate is elected.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the first module, students will:

- Demonstrate how to distribute ballot papers based on 2nd and 3rd preferences.

- Identify why a candidate is excluded in each exclusion round.

- Describe what happens to the votes of a candidate that is excluded.

- Recognise that a candidate must get an absolute majority to be elected.

Suggested extension knowledge and understanding activities

- Students research both preferential and first-past-the-post voting including what other countries use. Using this information, compare and contrast the different systems.

Suggested extension application activities:

UNIT OF WORK: **Election day in action**

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.

- Use the 'Unit of Work' in this module to conduct a class election.

Supplementary links with AEC resources

Links to other AEC education and information resources:

- Get Voting - school elections made easy
- Get Voting: Instructions for counting
- AEC poster: Counting House of Representatives Preferential voting
- AEC Ballot paper formality guidelines
- AEC House of Representatives count
- AEC TV video: Scrutineers look but don't touch
- AEC TV video: Counting the votes
- Preferential voting - Australian Electoral Commission

Key questions

1. What percentage of votes does a candidate need to reach an absolute majority?

    Answer: more than 50%.

2. Does the candidate need to reach more than 50% on 'first preference' votes?

    Answer: No. First preference votes are those which the voter marked '1' next to the candidate. Candidates often don't get more than 50% of first preference votes.

3. What happens when no one reaches an absolute majority on first preferences?

    Answer: The candidate with the lowest first preference votes is excluded – or ruled out. Then that candidate's votes are distributed – or moved - to the other candidates.

4. How do you decide how the excluded candidate's votes are redistributed to other candidates?

    Answer: You check each ballot paper to see what the voter put as their second preference – number 2 on the ballot paper. You then move the votes from the excluded candidate to the candidate that had number 2 next to them.

5. What happens if the first candidate is excluded and none of the remaining candidates have an absolute majority?

    Answer: The same process of excluding the candidate with the fewest preferences happens until only two candidates remain. Mathematically, a candidate should have an absolute majority by this point.

Election day in action

DEMOCRACITY MODULES
Election day, Election night and Distribution of preferences

KEY CONCEPT
Citizenship

RELATED CONCEPTS
- **Participation –** active engagement in democracy through voting.
- **Processes –** electoral systems (including preferential voting) and election roles.
- **Integrity –** fairness and accessibility of voting processes.

Overarching questions

How do electoral structures and safeguards support participation and a trusted outcome in democratic societies?

Inquiry questions:

Factual – What is preferential voting and how is it conducted on election day?

Conceptual – How do polling procedures contribute to secure and accessible voting?

Learning outcomes

By the end of the activities, students will:

- Explore and explain measures like ballot box integrity, accessible tools, and voter assistance options.

- Explain how the AEC ensures elections are secure and conducted transparently through the various roles and checks present in a polling place.

- Demonstrate how to complete a formal vote for the House of Representatives.

- Demonstrate understanding of the first preference count by determining ballot paper formality.

- Demonstrate understanding of the full distribution of preferences in a House of Representatives count.

- Recall the differences between full preferential voting and first past the post and critically evaluate how each affects representation.
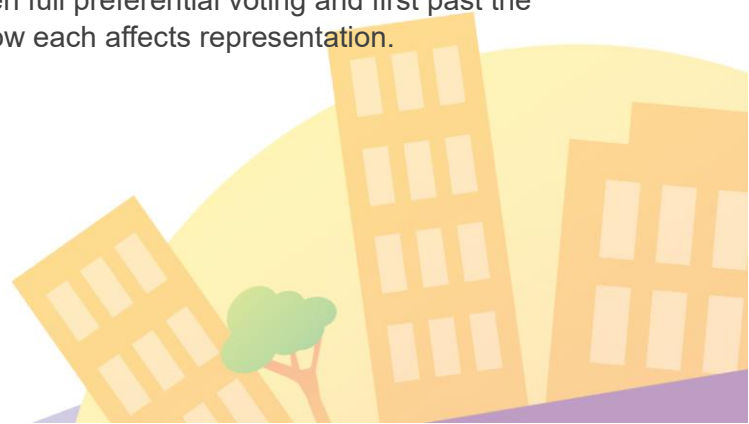
Suggested extension learning experiences and activities:

- Develop a resource pack (poster, video, guide) for educating first-time voters about polling place procedures and electoral integrity safeguards.

- Create an informative poster for 'completing a formal vote' for display in your polling place explaining how to vote and why it's important.

- Conduct a class election using 'Get Voting' resources. Conduct a full distribution of preferences to achieve an election result.

- Research full preferential versus first past the post voting and write an evaluation on how each impacts representation.

Election day in action - Suggested assessment rubric

Criteria	Level 1-2	Level 3-4	Level 5-6	Level 7-8
Criterion A: Knowing and understanding Use knowledge to explain concepts and ideas in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Demonstrates minimal knowledge of electoral systems and voting processes.	Demonstrates some knowledge, with limited application to unfamiliar scenarios.	Demonstrates accurate and relevant understanding of electoral systems in varied contexts.	Demonstrates comprehensive and insightful understanding of electoral processes and safeguards.
Criterion B: Investigating Formulate questions, plan investigations, and use methods effectively.	Identifies a basic question or hypothesis with minimal planning or reference to sources.	Develops questions and conducts investigations with some source variety or procedural structure.	Designs purposeful investigations using credible sources and clear methodology.	Conducts sophisticated inquiry with critical use of diverse sources and rigorous investigative planning.
Criterion C: Communicating Organise and express information in appropriate formats and styles.	Communicates with limited clarity or structure; errors interfere with understanding.	Communicates ideas using some structure and conventions; meaning is mostly clear.	Organises ideas clearly using appropriate formats and terminology relevant to electoral contexts.	Communicates persuasively and fluently using discipline-specific vocabulary and engaging formats.
Criterion D: Thinking critically Analyse concepts, arguments, evidence and draw reasoned conclusions.	Shows minimal analysis or evaluation; conclusions lack justification.	Attempts analysis with some logical reasoning; conclusions are basic or unsupported.	Evaluates evidence and arguments with reasoned conclusions relevant to civic contexts.	Demonstrates insightful analysis and synthesis, drawing well-substantiated conclusions about democracy.

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