



Types of election

First-past-the-post

Instructions on ballot paper

Mark the box next to the candidate of your choice. Only mark one box.

Under this system, the voter casts a single vote for the candidate of their choice. The candidate who receives the most votes is elected.

First-past-the-post is an easy voting method for schools, as voters only need to choose their first preference. You can also use first-past-the-post to elect candidates to two positions, for example school captain and vice-captain. The candidate with the most votes is elected to the senior position while the candidate with the second-most votes fills the other position.

From Federation in 1901 until 1917, Australia used the first-past-the-post voting system which was inherited from the United Kingdom. This system is still used in many countries today including the United States, Canada and India, but no longer used in Australia.

Preferential voting

Instructions on ballot paper

Number all the boxes in order of your choice.

The essence of preferential voting is that voters rank the candidates in the order of their choice. Voters put the number 1 next to their first choice, 2 next to their second choice, and so on. This means that if a voter's first choice of candidate is not elected, their vote may be re-examined and their other preferences taken into account. In this way, candidates can build an absolute majority of support (more than 50% of the votes) rather than the simple majority required under first-past-the-post voting.

Although more complicated, preferential voting delivers a result that is satisfactory to more voters.

The first use of preferential voting occurred in an Australian federal election in 1917 in a by-election in Victoria. It was then introduced at the next general election for both houses of federal parliament.