

NAME: _____

Forming a government, The House of Representatives

Vote counting commences immediately after polling places close at 6 pm. The vote count is carried out by the same electoral staff who have managed the election process at the polling place that day. The House of Representative votes are counted first.

The polling clerks sort the ballots according to first-preference votes and count them as they go. Any **informal votes** are put to one side and not included in the count.

Informal votes include a ballot paper that:

- is not marked at all
- does not have the official mark and has not been initialled by the polling official
- has writing on it which identifies the voter
- in the case of an absent vote the ballot paper is not contained in the declaration envelope
- the voter has not marked a vote correctly for it to be considered acceptable
- must contain the number 1 and sequential numbers thereafter. Only one candidate may be left un-numbered because it will be assumed this is the voter's final preference
- is blank, or where the voter has incorrectly numbered the candidates by only numbering one candidate or using non-sequential numbers or ticks and crosses
- in the Senate, the voter must place a number 1 in a box above the line, or, number all the boxes below the line in sequential order



The votes are counted at each polling place in an electorate and then added up for the electorate as a whole.

Each candidate is permitted to have at least one **scrutineer** present for the count. Scrutineers are usually members of the candidate's political party. They are required to fill out a form before the polling place closes, and to wear an identification badge while in the polling place.

A scrutineer will carefully watch the count to make sure it is conducted fairly and properly. They have the right to challenge any aspect of the count. For example, if a vote is declared informal because the voter appears to have made a mistake in completing the form, a scrutineer may challenge that decision if they disagree with the polling official.

The votes for all electorates are eventually counted; the political party that wins at least 76 of the 151 seats in the House of Representatives will be declared the winner of the election and will form government for the next three years.

When first preferences have been counted, the results are phoned through to the **Divisional Returning Officer (DRO)**. This is the official in charge of the voting process for the whole electorate. The DRO enters the results for each polling place in the electorate on the AEC's computerised election-management system. This system tallies the votes for all electorates across Australia and keeps a running total of seats won by each party.



The media also have access to these results, and a number of TV channels run special election-night programs with updates and commentary on the progress of the count.

A candidate has to have the majority of votes to win the election. This means having at least 50 per cent of the votes, plus one. If no candidate has that number of first-preference votes, then other preferences on ballot papers have to be counted. This is done by excluding the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes. Their votes are counted again, according to the voters' second-preference votes and distributed accordingly until a majority vote is achieved.