

Voting

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Voting is compulsory at federal elections for all Australian citizens 18 years or over who are on the Commonwealth Electoral Roll at the close of rolls for the election.



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House of Representatives

- ☐ Votes Counted by Vote Type

Senate

- ☐ Votes Counted by Vote Type



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Voting

Types of Votes

Australians can cast their vote in several ways:

- **ordinary vote:** a vote cast in a polling booth in the elector's home division on polling day. This is the simplest way to vote and the method used by the majority of electors
- **absent vote:** a vote cast by an elector out of their home division but still within their home State or Territory on polling day
- **pre-poll or postal vote:** a vote cast before polling day at a pre-poll voting centre or by post. These types of votes can be cast by an elector who will not be within their home State or Territory on polling day, is seriously ill, infirm, unable to leave work, or for religious reasons is unable to attend a polling place
- **provisional vote:** a vote cast in circumstances where an elector's name cannot be found on the roll or the name has already been marked off the roll. The vote cannot be counted until a careful check of enrolment records and entitlements has been made

An elector making a postal, pre-poll, absent or provisional vote must complete a declaration giving their personal details. These details

will be checked by the DRO prior to the counting of votes (the preliminary scrutiny).

The table below provides a comparison of the way in which Australians voted in the Senate at the last three elections:

Ordinary votes

2001		84.08%
1998		82.10%
1996		86.21%

Absent votes

2001		6.46%
1998		6.70%
1996		5.82%

Pre-poll, postal, provisional votes

2001		9.47%
1998		11.20%
1996		7.96%

Voting

Voting Systems

The electoral systems used to elect members to the Senate and House of Representatives are different.

Senate

Candidates for the Senate stand for election in a particular State or Territory. It is a Constitutional requirement that each State is equally represented in the Senate regardless of population. There is a total of 12 Senators for each State who are elected for a six year term. The two Territories are each represented by two Senators who are elected for a three year term equivalent to the duration of the House of Representatives.

Senators are elected by a proportional representation system. All the electors in a State or Territory are counted as the one electorate and vote in a number of Senators. To be elected, a candidate must win a proportion of the votes, also known as a quota.

There are a total of 76 positions in the Senate. When a double dissolution is declared all 76 Senate positions are made vacant.

Forty Senate vacancies are contested at a half-Senate election when it is held simultaneously with a House election - six from each State and the four from the Territories. The 2001 federal election was a half-Senate election.

House of Representatives

Candidates for the House of Representatives stand for election in a particular electoral division, and are elected for a maximum three year term.

Members of the House of Representatives are elected using the preferential voting system, with the electors in each division electing one Member to represent them. To be elected, a candidate must win the absolute majority of votes, that is more than half the formal votes cast for that division.

All 150 positions in the House of Representatives become vacant at a federal election.

Voting

How to Vote

How to vote for the Senate

On the Senate ballot paper an elector can either vote above the line or below the line, but not both.

Above the line: If an elector chooses to vote above the line, the number '1' is written in one of the boxes above the line. All other boxes on the paper are left blank. If an elector votes in the top section their preferences will be counted in the way chosen by the group or party voted for. This is called a group ticket vote and posters or booklets are displayed at all polling places showing how each party or group has decided to have their preferences distributed.

Only registered political parties or groups who have lodged a group voting ticket have a box above the line. At the 2001 federal election 95.2 per cent of voters chose to vote above the line.

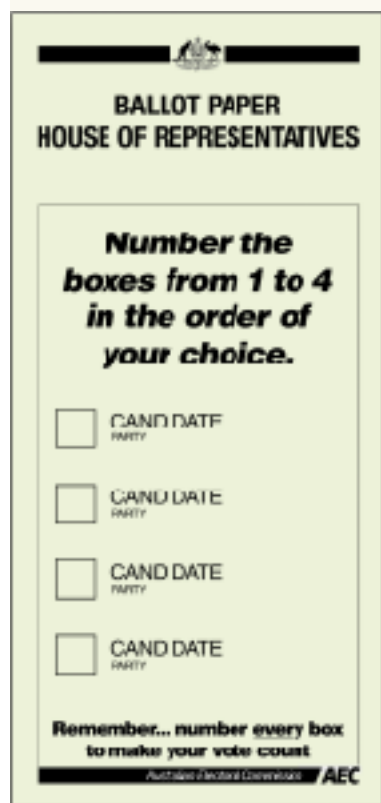
Below the line: If an elector chooses to vote below the line, all the boxes in the bottom section of the ballot paper must be numbered sequentially in the order of the elector's choice. The number '1' is written in the box of the elector's first choice candidate and the numbering is continued until there is a number in every box below the line, with no duplication or omission of any number.

All the candidates contesting the Senate election have a box below the line.

Voting

How to Vote

How to vote for the House of Representatives



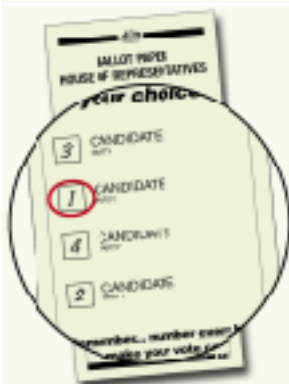
1. On the ballot paper for the House of Representatives the number '1' is written in the box of the elector's first choice.
2. The elector's continue to number the boxes until every box has been numbered in order of the elector's choice, with no duplication or omission of any number.
3. The ballot paper is folded and placed in the ballot box.

Voting

How the Votes are Counted

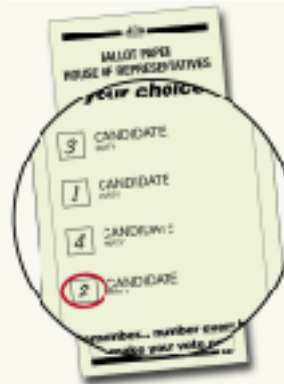
House of Representatives

The House of Representatives votes are counted as follows:



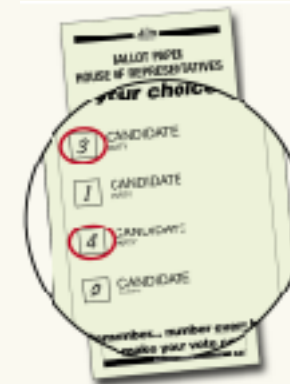
First preferences

First, all of the number '1' votes are counted for each candidate. If a candidate gets more than half the total of these number '1' votes (i.e. an absolute majority: $50\% + 1$), that candidate will be elected.



Second preferences

If, however, no candidate has more than half of the votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded. This candidate's votes are then transferred to the remaining candidates according to the number '2' votes shown on their ballot papers.



Further preferences

If still no candidate has more than half the votes, the candidate who now has the fewest votes is excluded and the votes are transferred according to the next preference shown for a candidate who has not been excluded. This process continues until one candidate has more than half the total votes and is declared 'elected'.

Voting

How the Votes are Counted

An Example

Three candidates Nick, Michael and Jenny stand for election. After the election the ballot papers are counted and there are 60,000 formal votes. Therefore the absolute majority needed to win the seat is 30,001 (50% +1).

Nick, Michael and Jenny received the following first preference or number '1' votes.



Nick
15,000



Michael
23,000



Jenny
22,000

Nobody has gained an absolute majority so the person with the lowest number of first preferences is excluded. This is Nick and the second preferences on his ballot papers are then distributed to either Michael or Jenny.

6,300 of the total number of people who voted for Nick put the number 2 in the box for Michael. The remaining 8,700 put the number 2 in the box for Jenny. This gives Michael a total of 29,300 and Jenny a total of 30,700.



Michael
23,000
+ 6 300
= 29,300



Jenny
22,000
+ 8 700
= 30,700

Now that Jenny has 30,700 votes, which is an absolute majority, she becomes the elected member.

This is a very simple example. The process could involve more than the two steps shown above. If there were more than three candidates, the candidates with the fewest votes will continue to be excluded and their preferences transferred, or distributed, until one candidate has an absolute majority.

ALTHOUGH HOW-TO-VOTE CARDS MAY ENCOURAGE ELECTORS TO MARK THEIR PREFERENCES IN A PARTICULAR ORDER, THE FINAL CHOICE OF WHICH ORDER TO USE IS UP TO EACH ELECTOR.

Voting

How the Votes are Counted

Senate

The Senate count is different to the House of Representatives and is more lengthy and complicated. A simplified summary of the main steps is as follows:

Working out the quota: To be elected to the Senate, a candidate needs to gain a quota of the formal votes. The quota is calculated by dividing the total number of formal ballot papers by one more than the number of Senators to be elected, and adding '1' to the result (ignoring any remainder). This is how the quota for New South Wales was calculated at the 2001 Senate election:

$$\frac{3,879,443}{(6 + 1)} + 1 = 554,207$$

Therefore the quota, or number of votes required to be elected, in New South Wales at the 2001 election was 554,207.

An example:

In this example three Senators are to be elected. The total number of formal votes for the 'state' is 2,400.

Therefore the

$$\text{QUOTA} = \{2,400 \div [3+1]\} + 1 = 601$$

All the ballot papers are then examined to see how many number '1' votes each candidate received.

Maria	240
Linh	550
Gerard	730
Jacqui	140
Kevin	590
Monica	150
	2,400 votes

Gerard is the only candidate to receive the quota of 601 immediately and so is elected.

The 129 votes he received in excess of the quota are called surplus votes. The surplus of 129 is transferred to the remaining candidates by transferring all Gerard's votes at less than their full value:

No. of surplus votes = 129

Total no. of Gerard's 1st preference votes = 730

Therefore the transfer value is $129 \div 730 = 0.177$

Voting

How the Votes are Counted

Senate (continued)

The list below shows the number of second preferences received by each candidate on Gerard's 730 ballot papers.

Maria	100
Linh	400
Jacqui	20
Kevin	150
Monica	60

These ballot papers are then multiplied by their transfer value and then added to the first preference totals.


	Transfer + Votes	1st Pref Votes	= New Total
Maria	$100 \times 0.177 = 18$	+ 240	= 258
Linh	$400 \times 0.177 = 71$	+ 550	= 621
Jacqui	$20 \times 0.177 = 3$	+ 140	= 143
Kevin	$150 \times 0.177 = 26$	+ 590	= 616
Monica	$60 \times 0.177 = 11$	+ 150	= 161

Now that Linh and Kevin have also reached the quota, the three vacancies have been filled.

Note: If all the vacancies have not been filled after the surplus votes have been transferred, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is excluded. The excluded candidate's ballot papers are distributed according to preferences, at the value which the votes were received, to the remaining candidates. The distribution of preferences from excluded candidates continues until the required number of senators is elected.

Voting

Formal and Informal Votes

 see related statistics

House of Representatives

☐ [Informality Statistics](#)

Senate

☐ [Informality Statistics](#)

Ballot papers correctly marked according to the rules for voting are called formal votes and only formal votes contribute to determining the results of an election. Ballot papers that do not satisfy these rules are regarded as informal and after their total has been tallied they are excluded from any counting.

House of Representatives

A House of Representatives ballot paper is informal if:

- it is unmarked
- it has not received the initials of the presiding officer and is not considered authentic

[◀ previous](#)

- ticks or crosses have been used
- only one number is shown
- it has writing on it which identifies the elector
- boxes have been left blank
- numbers have been repeated, or
- the elector's intention is not clear



Immediately after their wedding at the Seymour Anglican Church in Victoria, a newly married couple walked into the adjoining church hall to perform their first civic duty as a couple, to vote at the 2001 federal election.

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Voting

Formal and Informal Votes

Senate

A Senate ballot paper is informal if:

- it is unmarked
- it has not received the initials of the presiding officer and is not considered authentic
- it has writing on it which identifies the elector, or
- the elector's intention is not clear

A vote above the line is informal if:

- it has no first preference mark, or
- if there is more than one first preference mark.

A vote below the line is informal if:

- it has no first preference mark
- a tick or cross is used as a first preference mark
- if there is more than one first preference mark
- less than 90 per cent of the boxes have been numbered, or
- there are more than three acceptable errors

◀ [previous](#)



Electors and party workers outside the polling place at Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club on polling day.

Informal Voting

At each election, the AEC undertakes numerous activities to inform electors of the correct way to vote in the Senate and House of Representatives. These activities are aimed at minimising the number of voters who cast an informal vote and therefore waste their vote.