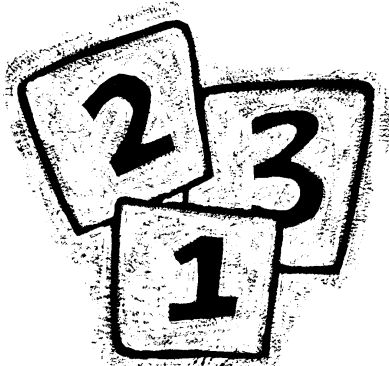


THE PREFERENTIAL VOTING SYSTEM



The voting system used for the Legislative Assembly (Lower House) of the Victorian Parliament is called full preferential voting. On each ballot paper, voters choose the candidate they most want to elect and write 1 in the box next to their name. They write 2 in the box next to their second choice, 3 in the box next to their third choice, until all boxes have numbers in them.



The system

Under the preferential voting system, a candidate must gain an absolute majority of the formal votes (50 per cent plus one vote) to be elected.

In electorates where there are three or more candidates, it is possible that no candi-

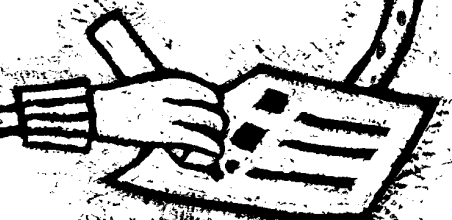
date will receive an absolute majority of first-preference votes. In these cases, preferences are distributed until one candidate gains an absolute majority.

During the count, the first preferences are counted first. In electorates where no candidate has an absolute majority of first-preference votes, distribution of the preferences of defeated candidates must be carried out as follows.

All the votes for the electorate are counted again (known as a re-check), then the candidate with the lowest number of first-preference votes is declared to be a defeated candidate. That candidate's votes are distributed to the other candidates according to the second preferences shown.

If there is still no absolute majority for any candidate, the candidate who now has the lowest number of votes is declared defeated, and that candidate's votes are distributed according to preferences for the continuing candidates.

This process continues until one candidate has an absolute majority of votes, and is declared elected.



Preferential voting: How to do it

This example shows how preferential voting works. Imagine an election, where there were 20 votes, and four candidates: Green, Brown, Blue and Yellow. The electoral officials counted the first preferences (number 1 votes) on the ballot papers, putting them in a separate pile for each candidate.

The results were:

COUNT	Green	Brown	Blue	Yellow	Total
First count	3	7	6	4	20

If this had been a first-past-the-post election, Brown would have won because he got more votes than any other candidate. However, under preferential voting, nobody had won at this stage, because a candidate needs at least 50 per cent of the votes plus one ($10 + 1 = 11$) to win.

The next step was to exclude the candidate who had the fewest first-preference votes (Green, with 3 votes) and distribute her ballot papers to the other candidates according to the second preferences (number 2) on Green's ballot papers. Green's ballot papers looked like this:

1	Green	1	Green	1	Green
2	Brown	4	Brown	4	Brown
4	Blue	2	Blue	3	Blue
3	Yellow	3	Yellow	2	Yellow

Write the results of the preference distribution in the table below.

COUNT	Green	Brown	Blue	Yellow	Total
First count	3	7	6	4	20
Distribution of Green's preferences	–				3
Result after first distribution	–				20

The result should show that still no candidate had a majority. Yellow then had the smallest number of votes. Yellow was excluded and her votes were distributed to the remaining two candidates according to the preferences on the ballot papers. Not all of them were second preferences. The votes had to be transferred to a candidate who was still in the count, so if the second preference on a ballot paper was for a candidate who had already been excluded, the third preference was counted.

Yellow's ballot papers (including the one transferred from Green), looked like this:

4	Green	4	Green	2	Green
3	Brown	2	Brown	4	Brown
2	Blue	3	Blue	3	Blue
1	Yellow	1	Yellow	1	Yellow

3	Green	1	Green
4	Brown	4	Brown
2	Blue	3	Blue
1	Yellow	2	Yellow

Write the results of the preference count in the table:

COUNT	Green	Brown	Blue	Yellow	Total
First count	3	7	6	4	20
Distribution of Green's preferences	–	1	1	1	3
Result after first distribution	–	8	7	5	20
Distribution of Yellow's preferences	–	–	–	–	5
FINAL COUNT	–	–	–	–	20

The result should show that Blue was the winner, even though he started with fewer first-preference votes than Brown.

Preferential voting works this way in any election, though the numbers of candidates and votes vary.



1. The Battle of the Sounds – Your vote counts.

A vote is to be taken to decide what kind of music will be played during the opening of a major sporting event. Voters are able to select a band whose music will be played. Selection will be based on the preferential system of voting.

Two radio stations – Freaky FM and Golden Oldies – have published how-to-vote cards. You are free to vote for whichever music you like, or follow a how-to-vote card.

Examine the examples provided below and complete the blank ballot paper that follows. You may be guided by the how-to-vote cards but remember, you are free to vote in whatever order you desire.

How to vote for Freaky FM

Foo Fighters	<input type="text" value="3"/>
Black Eyed Peas	<input type="text" value="2"/>
Green Day	<input type="text" value="5"/>
Coldplay	<input type="text" value="6"/>
Gorillaz	<input type="text" value="4"/>
Jet	<input checked="" type="text" value="1"/>
The Living End	<input type="text" value="7"/>
Cat Empire	<input type="text" value="8"/>

How to vote for Golden Oldies

Foo Fighters	<input type="text" value="6"/>
Black Eyed Peas	<input type="text" value="8"/>
Green Day	<input type="text" value="7"/>
Coldplay	<input checked="" type="text" value="1"/>
Gorillaz	<input type="text" value="4"/>
Jet	<input type="text" value="5"/>
The Living End	<input type="text" value="3"/>
Cat Empire	<input type="text" value="2"/>

Ballot PaperFoo Fighters Black Eyed Peas Green Day Coldplay Gorillaz Jet The Living End Cat Empire

On completion of the ballot:

- a. Have a count of the votes in your class to determine the most popular bands (by preferential voting).
 - b. As a class, establish the number of students who followed the how-to-vote card and the number who did not. Try to provide some reasons for this. For example:
 - were there other influences on voters – such as peer pressure, or order of names on the card, or age, or gender?
 - prepare a class list of the most common reasons given.
 - c. Write a brief comment that explains the advantages and disadvantages of how-to-vote cards.
2. Re-do the count as if it were a 'first-past-the-post' system. Discuss differences between the two systems and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Before completing this task, work through the exercises that follow.

3. Organise a favourite football team poll by following the steps below:

- a. Conduct a poll of all students in the class/school. Prepare a ballot paper with all the football teams. Have a random draw of teams to determine their order on the ballot paper. Ask students to complete the ballot paper, numbering all the squares in order of preference.
- b. Count the number of first-preference votes for each of the teams.
- c. In a first-past-the-post poll, only the first choice would count. How many students voted for the team that got the most votes? How many did not?
- d. Did any team get more than 50% of the vote?

If not, count the preferences to determine the result according to the preferential voting system. Take the team with the fewest votes and distribute their preferences. Keep on doing this until one team gets more than 50% of the vote.

- e. Is there a different winner? After the preference distribution, how many votes were there for the winning team?

OR

4. Organise a travel destination poll by following the steps below:

- a. Compile a list of the 10 most popular travel destinations in Australia (perhaps contact some local travel agents for this information). Have a random draw of holiday destinations to determine their order on the ballot paper.
- b. Conduct a poll of all students in the school, with the students numbering the destinations from 1–10 in order of preference.
- c. Count the number of first-preference votes for each of the 10 destinations.
- d. In a first-past-the-post poll, only the first choice would count. How many students got their first choice? How many did not get their choice?
- e. Now count the preferences to determine the result according to the preferential voting system.

- f. Is there a different winner? After the distribution of preferences, how many votes were there for the winner?

