

CONDUCTING A SCHOOL-BASED ELECTION

Unit
7

The purpose of this activity is to give you the opportunity to participate in an election.

Your class or year level will hold an election taking on the different roles of:

- candidates;
- voters;
- journalists; and
- electoral officials.



Imagine that the principal has announced that there will be a lunch-time radio station operating over the public address system at lunch-times beginning next term. She is calling for a group from the year nine or ten level to run the radio program and to choose the music that will be played. An election will be held to decide which group will win the right to run the radio station.

In your class divide into the following roles:

- candidates and their party supporters (about twelve students – four candidates, each with two party supporters);
- election officials to run the election (about nine students); and
- the media (about five students).

An election can be held over any issue. If you don't like the topic mentioned, choose your own. It can be serious, for example: solutions for youth unemployment or how best to deal with the community drug problem. Alternatively it can be something odd or not too serious such as: which tree should rule the Earth? Imagine being the party leader for the Oak Tree Party and debating against the leader of the Gum Tree Party?

1. The election officials

Before beginning, think about the sorts of qualities election officials need to conduct fair and impartial elections. How should they behave publicly and privately? The tasks of the election officials follow:

a. Preparation of the election timetable

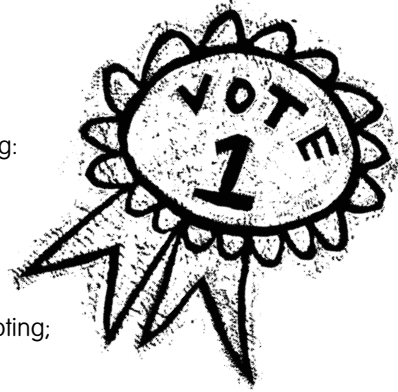
The election officials must set the timetable for the election including:

- announcement of the election;
- draw for candidates' positions on the ballot paper; and
- organisation of election day.

b. Setting the election rules

The election officials must establish and publish rules regarding:

- whether voting is to be compulsory;
- whether fines will be imposed on those who do not vote and how they will be enforced;
- what will be considered to be a reasonable excuse for not voting;
- who is entitled to vote;
- whether a deposit should be required from candidates and in what circumstances a candidate would receive his/her deposit back;
- penalties for bribery or intimidation;
- types of advertising to be allowed. For example, whether anonymous advertising should be allowed;
- the conduct of candidates and their representatives on election day (for example, how close can candidates and their representatives be to where voting occurs);
- distribution of materials by candidates on election day;
- any circumstances allowing a voter to vote before election day;
- voting hours;
- how votes will be counted; and
- whether candidates or their representatives will be allowed to scrutinise the counting of votes.



c. The election arrangements

The election arrangements must be 'officially' advertised so that voters and candidates know how they can take part in the election.

For example:

- voters need to know the subject of the election;
- the key election dates;
- the rules for candidates;
- the names of candidates;
- how to fill in the ballot paper; and
- where and when to vote.

The election officials must arrange for a random draw of candidates' names to allocate each candidate's position on the ballot paper. All candidates should be invited to attend the draw.

An exact number of ballot papers needs to be printed and kept securely on election day. All ballot papers must be accounted for.

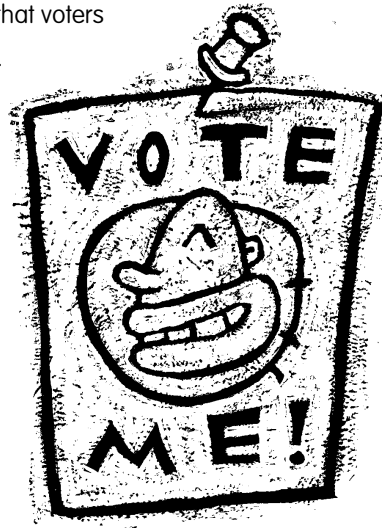
Election officials must arrange for a voting centre(s) and make sure that voting is secret and not congested.

An election official must announce the detailed results of the poll at a public forum.

2. The role of candidates and the party supporters

Students taking this role need to consider how they are going to persuade people to vote for them. The major tasks are:

- deciding major policies;
- developing an agenda if elected (and if you had some power to implement your policies);
- determining how policies are likely to be received by voters. What can you do to find out what voters think about the issue?
- deciding on ways to influence voters to elect you;
- how to get the best coverage in the daily media? What image do you want to project regarding your policies and your candidate as a person?
- developing a plan for your campaign. (Do you have any special policy initiatives you want to announce throughout the election? At what stage of the election do you want to announce your policies?);
- preparing a newspaper advertisement or a video advertisement to influence voters;
- preparing a 5–10 minute speech to give to voters on the issues of the election; and
- preparing other election advertising, and your how-to-vote cards to distribute to voters on election day.



3. The role of the media

Students taking this role need to prepare their tasks to:

- ensure there is good media reporting of the election;
- make sure the aims of a good journalist are met;
- publish and distribute daily media reports throughout the election (newspapers, video items and so on);
- conduct video interviews with the candidates;
- follow the candidates on their campaign trails and report on their policies;
- identify the main issues in the election; and
- report on the sorts of voters who will vote for particular candidates and why;

and finally

- conduct a media poll before election day to predict the result of the election. For example, select a random sample of 10% of students in the year level. Record data about each student participating in the poll: age, male/female, types of subjects they study. Publish the results. Report on which candidate is likely to win and why? What effect is the poll likely to have on the candidates and the voters?

