



Local council elections

Scrutineer handbook

Local council elections
Scrutineer handbook

This page is intentionally left blank.

Contents

Glossary.....	5
Election personnel	5
Election terms	5
Introduction	9
Scrutineer timeline	11
1. Appointment as a scrutineer	13
Overview	13
1.1 About your role	13
1.2 Eligibility	13
1.3 Observing election activities	14
1.4 Scrutineer quotas.....	15
1.5 Scrutineer appointment	16
2. Conditions of entry for scrutineers.....	17
Overview	17
2.1 Expected scrutineer behaviour	17
2.2 Use of electronic devices – restriction on recording	18
3. Voting period activities	19
Overview	19
3.1 Observing ballot pack posting.....	19
3.2 Observing ballot paper envelope processing	19
4. Ballot paper extraction and counting activities.....	21
Overview	21
4.1 Observing ballot paper extraction	21
4.2 Observing a count.....	23
4.3 Observing a manual count for a single vacancy.....	23
4.4 Observing a computer count for a single vacancy	25
4.5 Observing a computer count for multiple vacancies	27
4.6 Availability of results	29
4.7 Formality of votes	30
4.8 Adjournment	31
4.9 Recount of votes	31
5. Electoral compliance – scrutineers	33
Overview	33
5.1 Offences.....	33
6. Feedback and complaints	35
Overview	35
6.1 Responding to feedback and complaints.....	35

Appendix 1. Appointment and declaration of scrutineer form	37
Appendix 2. Registration checklist.....	38
Appendix 3. Scrutineer rights and responsibilities poster.....	39
Appendix 4. Conditions of entry for scrutineers poster	40
Appendix 5. Ballot paper formality rules.....	41

Glossary

Election personnel

Candidate	A person who has nominated to contest an election.
Chief executive officer (CEO)	The person appointed under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (Vic) by a council to be its chief executive officer or any person acting in that position.
Councillor	A person who holds the office of member of a council.
Count team leader/ Computer count team leader	A person appointed to direct the activities of a team of counting officers/data entry operators.
Data entry operator	A person appointed to enter computer count data.
Electoral Commissioner	The statutory officer appointed by the Governor-in-Council with responsibility for the proper conduct of parliamentary and local council elections.
Election manager	The person appointed by the Electoral Commissioner to be responsible for the administration of a council election.
Election official	A person appointed by the VEC to work at an election.
Scrutineer	A person appointed by a candidate to represent the candidate during electoral activities and make sure the election is conducted according to the law.

Election terms

Absolute majority	More than 50% of the formal votes in an election.
The Act	The <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (Vic).
Ballot pack	<p>For a local council election, the VEC mails each voter an envelope with all the ballot materials the voter needs. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a ballot paper • candidate statements, photographs and voting instructions • a multi-language leaflet for selected councils • a ballot paper envelope with a detachable declaration flap the voter must sign • a reply-paid envelope to post the sealed ballot paper envelope in.

Ballot paper	The official paper listing the names of all the candidates contesting the election on which the voter records their preferences for each candidate in the election.
Ballot paper envelope	The envelope the voter puts their completed ballot paper in. The envelope includes a detachable flap containing the name and address of the voter. The voter is required to sign a declaration on the flap.
Ballot paper extraction	The process of separating the declaration flap from a ballot paper envelope, removing the envelope's contents and determining if an admissible ballot paper was contained in the envelope.
By-election	An election to fill an extraordinary vacancy on a council.
Computer count	The electronic counting of votes after ballot paper preferences are manually entered by an election official.
Council	A local government authority as defined and set out in the Act. There are 79 councils in Victoria.
Election day	The day of an election, fixed under the Act. For elections held entirely by postal voting, there is no voting on election day.
Local Government Inspectorate (LGI)	The Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) investigates alleged offences under the Act, including electoral offences. LGI's role in elections is to receive, assess and investigate offences related to electoral provisions of the Act. This may involve candidates, community groups and voters.
Manual count	A method of vote counting most commonly used for elections for single-councillor vacancies, whereby ballot papers are physically sorted into piles based on the voters' first preferences until an absolute majority is reached by a candidate. If no absolute majority is determined by counting first preferences, the manual count proceeds to a preference distribution.
Preference distribution	The process used to determine the successful candidate in an election when no candidate has received enough first preference votes to be elected or there are still vacancies to be filled.
Preliminary scrutiny	Checking envelopes containing postal, unenrolled and other declaration votes. Also known as ' ballot paper envelope processing ' or ' declaration envelope processing '.
Proportional representation	The process used to elect representatives in proportion to their level of support in an election with multiple vacancies.
Quota (counting)	When a candidate must be elected on the number of votes equal to or exceeding a quota, the quota is determined by dividing the total number of formal votes by the number of vacancies plus one, and adding one to the result.
Recount	A re-examination and count of one or more parcels of ballot papers by an election manager before the declaration of the result.
The Regulations	The <i>Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020</i> (Vic).

Replacement vote/replacement envelope	A replacement vote is issued when a voter claims to have lost or spoilt their ballot material or claims that they did not receive a ballot pack.
Short batch	A bundle of the remaining ballot papers when all the ballot papers in an activity have been grouped into bundles of a consistent number, such as 50. For example, if there are 215 ballot papers in an activity, they will be grouped into 4 bundles of 50 ballot papers and a short batch of 15.
Scrutiny	The checking and counting of ballot papers and ballot paper envelopes to determine the result of an election.
Unenrolled vote	A vote made by a person who claims to be entitled to vote but whose name cannot be found on the voters' roll.
Unsubdivided council	A council not divided into wards.
Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC)	The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is responsible for the conduct of parliamentary and local council elections in Victoria. The Electoral Commissioner is the head of the VEC.
Voter	A person enrolled to vote at a local council election.
Voters' roll	A list of the names and addresses of people who are eligible to vote in the election. The certified voters' roll is a merger of the CEO's List provided by council with the Electoral Commissioner's list of State electors in that council. A voters' roll is created for each individual election.
Ward	A subdivision of a council. In subdivided councils, one or more councillors are elected to represent a ward.

This page is intentionally left blank.

Introduction

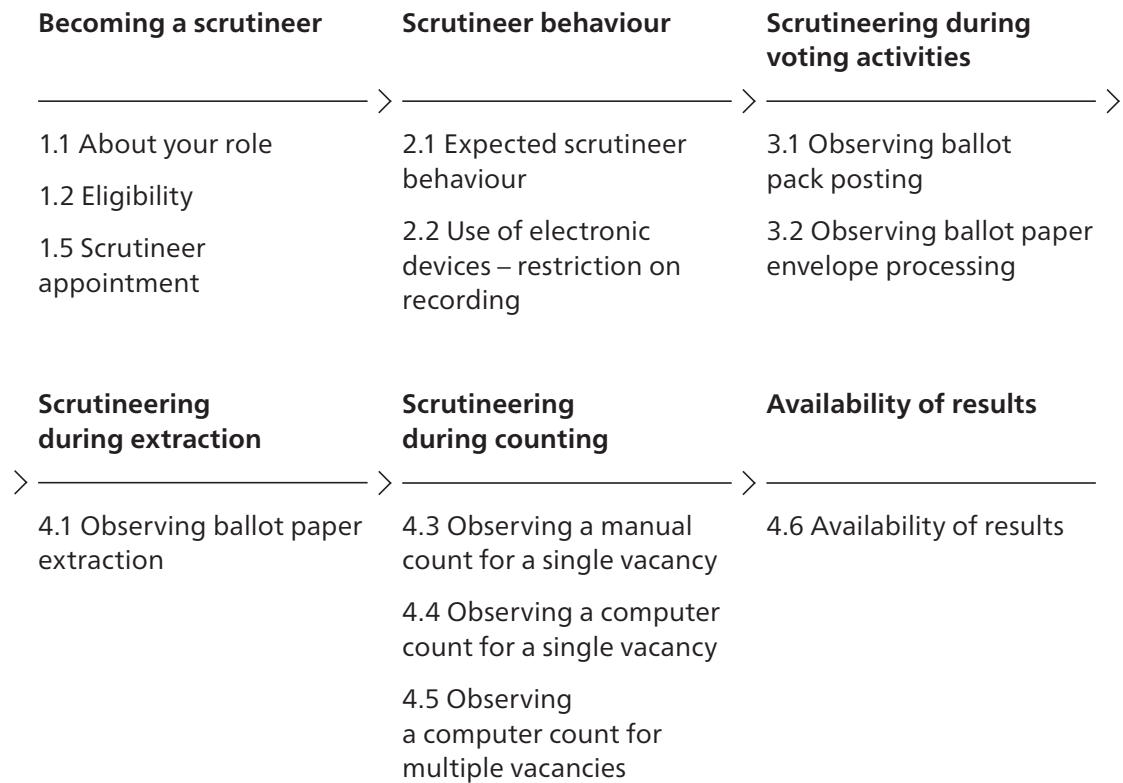
This handbook is for anyone who has been appointed as a scrutineer in a local council election or by-election. The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) administers these elections and has produced this resource.

The handbook outlines aspects of electoral law that relate directly to scrutineers and explains the activities that you may be appointed to represent your candidate at. The handbook is not a substitute for the law and should be read alongside the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) (the Act) and the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020* (Vic) (the Regulations). The most recent versions of Victorian legislation are available at legislation.vic.gov.au

As a scrutineer, you represent the interests of a candidate in the election. Candidates should also read this handbook to familiarise themselves with the requirements of scrutineers and what can be expected at an election venue. We will provide council-specific information to your candidate throughout the election period. It is your candidate's responsibility to share this information with you.

This page is intentionally left blank.

Scrutineer timeline



This page is intentionally left blank.

1. Appointment as a scrutineer

Overview

This chapter explains the role and responsibilities of scrutineers at local council elections, including eligibility requirements and the process of being appointed as a scrutineer by a candidate.

1.1 About your role

Candidates are not permitted in election venues during extraction and counting activities. Instead, candidates appoint scrutineers to observe these activities and represent their interests. Scrutineers are an important part of delivering a free and fair election. You contribute to integrity, fairness, transparency and public trust in the election.

Scrutineers can observe or challenge certain election activities to ensure the integrity of the election. See [1.3 Observing election activities](#) for more information.

Each candidate is allowed to appoint one scrutineer for each election official involved in the election activity being observed. See [1.4 Scrutineer quotas](#) for more information.

Your candidate will need to appoint you as a scrutineer for the activities of the election they are contesting. You must be separately appointed to represent any other candidate for other by-elections.

You must cooperate with election officials. If you do not obey the instructions of an election official, election manager or VEC staff, you may be removed from a venue for misconduct. See [5.1 Offences](#) for more information.

1.2 Eligibility

You cannot be a scrutineer if you are:

- a councillor of the council
- a candidate at the election
- a candidate at another ward's election occurring at the same time for the same council
- working for the VEC at the election.

1.3 Observing election activities

You can observe election activities before the close of voting as well as ballot material processing and counting.

The activities you can observe are:

- posting of ballot packs
- opening and emptying a post office box
- opening and emptying a postal ballot box
- receiving and processing of returned ballot paper envelopes
- ballot paper extraction
- manual counting and computer counting
- recounts.

We will advise your candidate of the venue and start time for each election activity. We will also advise your candidate of any major changes to start times and/or venues.

Your candidate is responsible for notifying you of activity schedules and any changes.

You should arrive before the start of a session to ensure you are signed in and briefed before activities begin. You may be asked to wait in a designated scrutineer area or leave the venue when activities for your candidate's election are not occurring.

Observable or challengeable

The role of scrutineers varies between election activities. Scrutineering activities comprise of observable and challengeable activities. The activities you can be appointed to observe are outlined below.

Activity	Observable	Challengeable
Posting of ballot packs	Yes	No
Opening and emptying postal ballot receptacles	Yes	No
Receiving and admitting or rejecting returned declaration envelopes	Yes	No
Removing declaration flaps and opening declaration envelopes	Yes	No
Extracting ballot papers from declaration envelopes	Yes	No
Sorting ballot papers to identify obviously informal votes	Yes	No
Interpreting preferences marked on a ballot paper and deciding formality	Yes	Yes

Activity	Observable	Challengable
Counting, rechecking and recounting ballot papers	Yes	Yes
Performing a countback of votes to fill an extraordinary vacancy	Yes	Yes

While observing counting activities, you might disagree with the decision of an election official to count a ballot paper. If this happens, you may challenge the decision. The election manager will review your challenge and make a decision about the ballot paper. See [3. Voting period activities](#) for more information.

1.4 Scrutineer quotas


The number of scrutineers that can observe an election activity is limited. This is known as the scrutineer quota.

Each candidate can be represented by no more than one scrutineer for every election official engaged in the election activity being conducted.

Because of this quota, you must identify which candidate you represent at every activity.

An election official is 'engaged in an activity' when they are participating, overseeing, monitoring, or otherwise involved in an activity or process. They remain 'engaged in the activity' even when they are temporarily absent.

The scrutineer quota for an activity is determined by the number of staff engaged in the activity and size of the venue. The scrutineer quota for each activity will be communicated to candidates by email with the counting schedule.

 Example: If there are 5 election officials counting ballot papers and 4 candidates contesting the election, you may be one of up to 5 scrutineers representing your candidate, and up to 20 scrutineers observing the activity.

From time to time, the VEC may change a scrutineer quota or limit the number of scrutineers able to represent each candidate for an activity or process to:

- maintain fair access for all scrutineers
- meet health and safety requirements
- meet other lawful obligations.

Candidates will be advised by email at the earliest time available, if any changes need to be made to the scrutineer quota for each activity.

❗ Important: It is your candidate's responsibility to share any scrutineer quota information with you and tell you about any changes that have been communicated to them.

Election officials will monitor the number of scrutineers observing an activity to ensure scrutineer quotas are maintained. You can enter or leave at any time during election activities. When you leave, another scrutineer can enter the activity in your place if they have been appointed by your candidate and scrutineer quotas have not been reached.

You may be removed from a venue if there are more scrutineers for your candidate at an activity than allowed. In the event this happens, the election manager will ask the impacted scrutineers to decide who will continue to observe the activity, and who will leave the venue. If the scrutineers cannot reach a decision the election manager will ask the last scrutineer signed in to leave the venue.

1.5 Scrutineer appointment

Scrutineers are appointed for a specific election and can only observe activities for that election (ward or unsubdivided council).

Before you can observe an election activity, you must be appointed by a candidate. You will need to:

1. complete an *Appointment and declaration of scrutineer* form. Forms are available from the election manager, online at vec.vic.gov.au/scrutineer-council-election or in the *Candidate information kit*
2. ensure your candidate has signed the form
3. bring the candidate-signed form to the venue and sign the declaration section yourself in front of an election official at the time of registration.

You must not sign the declaration section of the form until you are in the presence of an election official.

Election activities may take place at different venues during the election period. You must provide a separate *Appointment and declaration of scrutineer* form for each venue that you attend before you can observe the election activities. You must register one form per venue, per candidate.

See [Appendix 1. Appointment and declaration of scrutineer form](#) for a sample version of the required form. Forms are available from the election manager, online at vec.vic.gov.au/scrutineer-council-election or in the *Candidate information kit*.

See [Appendix 2. Registration checklist](#) to check you are prepared for all the required steps in registering as a scrutineer.

Scrutineer rights and responsibilities will be displayed as a poster in venues. Refer to [Appendix 3. Scrutineer rights and responsibilities poster](#) to familiarise yourself with this information.

2. Conditions of entry for scrutineers

Overview

This chapter outlines all the conditions of entry requirements that you agree to follow when you sign the *Appointment and declaration of scrutineer* form.

Conditions of entry for scrutineers 'Do's and Don'ts' will be displayed as a poster in venues to reinforce what is expected when you are observing election activities. Refer to [Appendix 4. Conditions of entry for scrutineers poster](#) to familiarise yourself with this information.

2.1 Expected scrutineer behaviour

We expect you to behave consistently with the obligations prescribed by law when observing election activities at your appointed venues.

Any misconduct or failure to obey the lawful directions of an election official is an offence and you may be removed from the venue. See [5. Electoral compliance – scrutineers](#) for more information.

Do:

- Present your completed *Appointment and declaration of scrutineer* form to an election official at the scrutineer registration desk.
- Have multiple appointment forms if:
 - you have been appointed by more than one candidate at the same venue
 - you have been appointed by a single candidate for multiple venues.
- Sign the hard copy declaration in the presence of the election official at the scrutineer registration desk. If your form is not properly completed, you will not be able to enter the venue.
- Participate in the required briefings provided to all scrutineers. Briefings will cover your rights and responsibilities as a scrutineer and will explain the activity you are observing.
- Only enter the activity space when ballot material for your candidate's election is being processed. An activity space is any area where a process is occurring that scrutineers are allowed to observe.
- Always keep your scrutineer lanyard visible. This lanyard shows the council and ward you have been appointed to observe.
- Follow all rules at the venue and follow the instructions of election managers and election officials.
- Behave courteously and professionally towards venue staff.

Don't:

- Interfere with or attempt to influence any voters.
- Communicate with anyone in the venue except when it is necessary for your scrutineer role.
- Touch ballot paper envelopes or ballot papers.
- Observe activities you are not registered and signed-in for.
- Communicate with election staff during activities or breaks.
- Behave in a way that distracts election officials from performing their duties. This includes talking loudly, talking on mobile phones, or not giving officials enough space to perform their duties.
- Obstruct or delay any activities, or behave in a disorderly manner.
- Share results with anyone other than your candidate (e.g., the media or other interested parties) until they are officially announced or published by the VEC.

2.2 Use of electronic devices – restriction on recording

You can use an electronic device as long as it doesn't interfere with election activities.

 Example: You must step away from the activity to use a mobile phone.

While you are a scrutineer you must not use your phone or any other device to record or photograph:

- ballot papers
- declarations
- forms
- any VEC employee, agent, appointee, or contractor. This includes election managers and officials.

Devices that must not be used to record include mobile phones, smart watches, tablets, laptops, cameras, video recorders, or any other technology that can record, save and transmit images and footage.

3. Voting period activities

Overview

This chapter explains key activities that take place during the voting period of local council elections and by-elections. Ballot pack posting and ballot envelope processing are activities that scrutineers may observe.

These activities are often spread over a number of days. This means that detailed schedules for when each council will conduct the specific activities are not routinely communicated to candidates in the emailed bulletins. If a candidate would like a scrutineer to attend any of these activities, they will need to contact the election manager for activity-specific scheduling information.

You can only observe activities for the election your candidate is contesting, so you may be able to observe for only small periods of time and may be asked to leave the venue when no activity is occurring for your appointed election.

3.1 Observing ballot pack posting

The VEC contracts the preparation of ballot packs to a mail house and supervises this activity. The general mail-out of ballot packs occurs over several days (usually 4 days, but not less than 3 days), with no more than 35% permitted to be posted to voters on any one day. Information on the mail-out dates for the election is available on our website at vec.vic.gov.au

You can observe ballot pack posting at the mail house. You can only be present during the ballot pack posting for the election that your candidate is contesting.

Australia Post delivers returned ballot material to the election office. The election manager or an assigned election official may also collect returned ballot material from the local postal facility.

3.2 Observing ballot paper envelope processing

You can observe election officials receiving and processing ballot paper envelopes returned by voters. This happens daily during the voting period and postal vote receipt period and includes checking if votes can be admitted to extraction or should be rejected (known as 'declaration scrutiny').

Postal vote receipt period

Postal voting closes at 6 pm on the last working day before election day. Postal votes may be admitted to the count if:

- the voter voted before 6 pm on the last working day before election day, and
- the election manager receives the postal vote before 12 noon on the fifth working day after election day.

Ballot paper envelope processing

Ballot paper envelopes are processed in 2 groups – group A and group B:

- group A: ballot paper envelopes returned before the close of voting
- group B: remaining ballot paper envelopes returned before the close of the postal vote receipt period.

Group A extraction will usually begin during the week following the close of voting.

Group B extraction cannot start until after the close of the postal vote receipt period.

When election officials receive ballot paper envelopes, they:

1. record the return of the ballot paper envelopes on the voters' roll
2. check if each envelope can be admitted for extraction.
 - If the declaration has been signed by the voter or an authorised person and the declaration is dated on or before the close of voting, the envelope can be admitted. Election officials will also consider any Australia Post markings on the envelope when deciding if the vote is eligible to be included in extraction.
 - If the declaration is not signed or the voter did not complete their vote on or before the close of voting, the envelope must be rejected.
 - If a voter has returned more than one envelope (for example, a general mail-out and a replacement envelope), the election manager will decide during group B processing if any of the returned envelopes can be admitted.
3. refer any envelope to the VEC's head office to check for entitlement if a voter does not appear on the voters' roll but their declaration claims they are (known as an 'unenrolled vote'). VEC head office staff will engage with the council to determine if the person is entitled to vote and will inform the election manager of the outcome
4. separate admitted and rejected envelopes
5. advise any scrutineers present how many envelopes have been admitted and can proceed to extraction
6. store the envelopes in a secure location when not being processed.

4. Ballot paper extraction and counting activities

Overview

This chapter explains the processes involved in ballot paper extraction and counting. More information on how the VEC manages extraction and counting at local council elections is available on our website at vec.vic.gov.au.

Once the ballot paper envelopes have been processed, the ballot papers must be extracted from the ballot paper envelopes. After the extraction is complete, the count can begin.

There are different ways to count votes depending on what type of vacancy is being filled. Votes may be counted manually or entered into the VEC's computer count application and counted by computer. Your candidate will be advised what type of counting will take place to determine the result in the election they are contesting.

Results cannot be finalised until after 12 noon on the fifth working day after election day, to allow for all postal votes to be received. Because of this extended receipt period, counting activities may take place over more than one day.

The election manager will communicate the count schedule to your candidate by email before extraction and counting activities are due to begin.

The VEC will run a separate computer count information session for candidates in elections that are proceeding to computer counting to explain the process in detail. The election manager will provide candidates with the details of how to access the session by email.

If you are observing a count activity that will continue into a different day, the election manager will let your candidate know the location and time of the continued count schedule.

4.1 Observing ballot paper extraction

You can observe election officials as they extract ballot papers from ballot paper envelopes so that the ballot papers can be counted.

During ballot paper extraction, identifying declaration flaps are separated and set aside, envelopes are opened, and ballot papers are extracted from the envelope. The number of ballot papers that will proceed to the count is determined during the ballot paper extraction process.

To extract the ballot papers, the election officials will:

1. run envelopes through a letter opening machine to separate the identifying declaration flap on the envelope
2. remove the declaration flap containing the voter's details from each envelope and put these to the side for sorting and storage
3. run envelopes through the letter opening machine a second time to open them
4. open each envelope and remove the contents to determine if the ballot paper can be admitted to the count. If the ballot paper envelope:
 - contains a single ballot paper for the correct election, it will be admitted
 - contains multiple ballot papers, it will be rejected
 - is empty, it will be rejected
 - is for the correct election but has the wrong ballot paper inside, it will be rejected
 - is for another ward in the same council and the ballot paper inside matches the ward on the envelope, it will be transferred by the election manager to the correct ward.
5. put admitted ballot papers into bundles of 50, plus a short batch of the remainder (less than 50), unless moving immediately to ballot paper sorting and batching for a computer count.
6. put the empty ballot paper envelopes into bundles of 50 and put these to the side for sorting and storage.

When election officials have extracted all ballot papers from the envelopes, they will announce the total number of ballot papers proceeding to the count. This may vary from the total number of envelopes as some envelopes may have been rejected.

If the ballot papers are proceeding to a computer count, election officials will sort the ballot papers further to identify obviously informal votes before batching formal and informal votes into piles of 50. This is an administrative process to help the computer count run smoothly, and you cannot challenge the decision for a ballot paper to be placed into the 'obviously informal' batch at this stage.

❗ Important: You will have the opportunity to observe and challenge ballot paper formality during the computer count.

All ballot papers sorted as 'obviously informal' during the extraction activity will be reviewed again by the election manager during the computer count before they can be counted as informal, and you can observe and challenge this process.

All ballot papers are packed into security boxes and stored until the computer count starts. If the ballot papers are to be moved to another venue, or if they are not to proceed directly to computer count, they are sealed and stored securely.

4.2 Observing a count

You can observe election officials counting ballot papers and challenge the formality of a ballot paper during a count. Counting processes are intentionally methodical and are not rushed.

There are different ways to count votes depending on what type of vacancy is being filled. Single vacancies (one councillor per ward) are typically counted manually but may be counted by computer in some circumstances. To be elected, candidates must obtain an absolutely majority of the formal vote.

Multiple vacancies (more than one councillor per ward or unsubdivided councils) are counted by computer. At a computer count, the preferences on each ballot paper are entered into our computer count application by data entry operators and a result is calculated. To be elected, candidates must receive a proportion of votes known as a 'quota' of the formal vote.

We will let your candidate know ahead of time whether their election will be counted manually or by computer.

A guide on ballot paper formality is included in [Appendix 5. Ballot paper formality rules](#).

4.3 Observing a manual count for a single vacancy

Voters choose candidates by numbering all the boxes on a ballot paper in order of preference. Number 1 is their first preference.

To be successfully elected in a single vacancy election, a candidate must have more than half (more than 50%) of all formal votes. This is known as an 'absolute majority'.

If no candidate has an absolute majority, we conduct a preference distribution.

The candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and their votes are passed on to other candidates according to the next highest preference on each voter's ballot paper.

This process is repeated until one candidate has an absolute majority.

First preferences

To manually obtain first preference results for single vacancy elections, election officials:

1. sort ballot papers to first preferences for each candidate and set informal votes aside
2. count the number of ballot papers for each candidate and informal ballot papers, and record the result.

If a candidate has received an absolute majority, a preference distribution is not required and the candidate is elected.

Preference distribution

If no candidate has received an absolute majority of first preference votes, a preference distribution will be conducted.

To manually distribute preferences for single vacancy elections, election officials:

1. combine the group A and group B ballot papers before beginning the preference distribution
2. exclude the candidate with the fewest votes
3. transfer the excluded candidate's ballot papers to the remaining candidates based on the next highest preference (e.g. number 2 for second preference)
4. count the redistributed ballot papers for each eligible candidate and add the total to their previous result.

If a candidate has received an absolute majority of votes (more than 50%) by this preference distribution, the candidate is elected.

This process is repeated using all remaining preferences until one of the remaining candidates reaches an absolute majority of votes and is elected. Once a candidate is elected, the ballot papers are placed in security boxes and sealed.

Challenges to ballot paper formality during a manual count

You may challenge the formality of a ballot paper during the counting of votes.

If you disagree with how an election official has decided a ballot paper's formality, you can challenge the decision. Election officials place challenged ballot papers next to a 'challenged' card. The election manager will examine each challenged ballot paper and decide whether it can be admitted. They will write 'admitted' or 'rejected' on the back of each challenged paper with their initials and the date. This will indicate that the election manager has ruled on formality and the ballot paper cannot be challenged again if it appears in later preference distributions.

'Admitted' and 'rejected' are the only terms allowed to be written on ballot papers. Details of your challenge will not be recorded on a ballot paper.

❗ Important: The election manager's decision on a challenged ballot paper is final.

If required, the election manager may also place a dot sticker on admitted ballot papers and write their interpretation of a preference number on the dot sticker next to the number on the ballot paper for clarity.

4.4 Observing a computer count for a single vacancy

Single vacancy elections with a large number of ballot papers and/or candidates may be counted by computer.

Voters choose candidates by numbering all the boxes on a ballot paper in order of preference. Number 1 is their first preference.

To be successfully elected in a single vacancy election, a candidate must have more than half (more than 50%) of all first preference votes. This is known as an 'absolute majority'.

The computer application quickly and accurately applies the steps of the preferential counting method to determine a result.

Further information on computerised calculation, including the C# source code used by the VEC's computer count application, is available at vec.vic.gov.au/vote-counting

Computer count

To obtain the results for single vacancy elections by computer counting:

1. the number of boxes is confirmed to be correct, and the security seals are checked before the boxes can be opened
2. data entry operators enter the preferences on each ballot paper into the computer count application
3. the computer count application checks each ballot paper for formality during data entry. If the application identifies any informal ballot papers, the data entry operators set them aside
4. the election manager, or an assigned election official, checks all informal ballot papers and returns any they decide are formal to data entry
5. only the preferences from formal ballot papers are saved to the computer count application
6. the application calculates a result for the election when the data entry operators have entered all ballot papers
7. the election manager or assigned election official will make a provisional *Distribution of preferences* report available to you for review once the result has been calculated
8. the ballot papers are placed in security boxes and sealed when the count is completed.

Scrutiny of a computer count

You cannot engage in conversation or tell the data entry operator how to enter the data of a ballot paper.

During a computer count, you can:

- ask a computer count team leader for more information (such as when the *First preference votes counted report* will next be generated)
- query the data entry of a specific ballot paper or batch with the computer count team leader. If this occurs, the computer count team leader may review the relevant ballot papers with you, comparing them to the preferences shown on the *Ballot paper details* report.
 - If any errors are found, the computer count team leader will correct these in the computer count application.
 - If you do not agree with what has been data entered, you can request that the computer count team leader flags the ballot paper as informal for review by the election manager. The election manager will examine the ballot paper to decide formality.
 - Copies of the ballot paper formality guide will be available to reference during the count. See [Appendix 5. Ballot paper formality rules](#) for more information.

Batch audits will be conducted regularly throughout the count. Randomly selected batches from each data entry operator will be checked for accuracy against their *Ballot paper details* report.

Information on the VEC's validation procedures can be found in the *Availability of results guide*, available online at vec.vic.gov.au or from the election manager by request.

Formality checking occurs regularly throughout the count. Ballot papers marked as informal in the computer count application are removed from the batch and reviewed by the election manager to determine formality.

❗ Important: You can only challenge the formality of the ballot paper when it is being reviewed by the election manager or an assigned election official.

Ballot papers deemed informal are kept with the election manager and the total is entered into the computer count application before calculation.

Ballot papers that are deemed formal are added back into the count.

When a ballot paper is challenged, the election manager will write 'admitted' or 'rejected' on the back of each challenged paper with their initials and the date. If required, the election manager may also place a dot sticker on admitted ballot papers and write their interpretation of a preference number on the dot sticker next to the number on the ballot paper for clarity.

'Admitted' and 'rejected' are the only terms allowed to be written on ballot papers. Details of your challenge will not be recorded on a ballot paper.

❗ Important: The election manager's decision on a challenged ballot paper is final.

4.5 Observing a computer count for multiple vacancies

Proportional representation is a way of counting votes in an election when there is more than one councillor to be elected.

When there is more than one councillor to be elected, candidates must obtain a proportion of votes known as a 'quota' to be successfully elected.

Once a candidate obtains the quota and is successfully elected, all the successful candidate's ballot papers are distributed to the remaining candidates at a reduced value according to voters' preferences. The reduced value is calculated by dividing the number of votes over the quota by the number of ballot papers for the successful candidate.

If no candidate achieves the quota, or if there are still vacancies after all the votes over the quota have been passed on, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded. Their votes are passed on to other candidates according to voters' preferences. The process is repeated until all vacancies are filled.

The quota is calculated by dividing the number of formal votes by the number of vacancies plus one, then adding one to this figure. Any remainder is disregarded:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of formal votes}}{\text{Number of vacancies} + 1} \right) + 1 = \text{Quota}$$

The VEC uses a computer application for proportional representation counting because conducting these counts manually would be complex and time-consuming.

The VEC will run a separate computer count information session for candidates to explain the process in detail. The election manager will provide candidates with the details of this session by email. Scrutineers are also encouraged to view this session.

Further information on computerised calculation, including the C# source code used by the VEC's computer count application, is available at vec.vic.gov.au/vote-counting

Computer count

To obtain the results for multiple vacancy elections by computer count:

1. the number of boxes is confirmed to be correct and the security seals are checked before the boxes can be opened, if the ballot papers have been stored
2. data entry operators enter the preferences on each ballot paper into the computer count application
3. the computer checks each ballot paper for formality during data entry. If the computer identifies any informal ballot papers, the data entry operator sets them aside
4. the election manager or assigned election official checks the informal ballot papers and returns any they decide are formal to data entry

5. only the preferences from formal ballot papers are saved to the computer count application
6. when the data entry operators have entered all ballot papers, the application calculates a result
7. the election manager or assigned election official will make a provisional *PR Distribution* report available to you for review once the result has been calculated
8. when the count of the ballot papers is completed, the ballot papers are placed in security boxes and sealed.

Scrutiny of a computer count

During a computer count, you can:

- ask a computer count team leader for more information (such as when the *First preference votes counted* report will next be generated)
- query the data entry of a specific ballot paper or batch. If this occurs, the computer count team leader may review the relevant ballot papers with you, comparing them to the preferences shown on the *Ballot paper details* report.
 - If any errors are found, the computer count team leader will correct these in the computer count application.
 - If you do not agree with what has been data entered, you can request that the computer count team leader flags the ballot paper as informal for review by the election manager. The election manager will examine the ballot paper to decide formality.
 - Copies of the ballot paper formality guide will be available to reference during the count. See [Appendix 5. Ballot paper formality rules](#) for more information.

Batch audits will be conducted regularly throughout the count. Randomly selected batches from each data entry operator will be checked for accuracy against their *Ballot paper details* report.

Information on the VEC's validation procedures can be found in the *Availability of results guide*, available online at vec.vic.gov.au or from the election manager by request.

Formality checking occurs regularly throughout the count. Ballot papers marked as informal in the computer count application are removed from the batch and reviewed by the election manager to determine formality.

❗ Important: You can only challenge the formality of the ballot paper when it is being reviewed by the election manager or an assigned election official.

Ballot papers deemed informal are kept with the election manager and the total is entered into the computer count application before calculation.

Ballot papers that are deemed formal are added back into the count.

When a ballot paper is challenged, the election manager will write 'admitted' or 'rejected' on the back of each challenged paper with their initials and the date. A white dot sticker may be affixed to the ballot paper to indicate the preference decision made by the election manager.

'Admitted' and 'rejected' are the only terms allowed to be written on ballot papers. Details of your challenge will not be recorded on a ballot paper.

❗ Important: The election manager's decision on a challenged ballot paper is final.

4.6 Availability of results

Availability of manual count results

Printed copies of a '*Provisional*' *Preference distribution report* are shared with you once the results have been validated. The election manager will write 'Provisional' on all copies.

Result reports should not be shared with anyone other than your candidate (e.g. the media or other interested parties) until they are officially announced or published by the VEC.

Availability of computer count results

You may request the following information during a computer count:

1. First preference votes counted

Provisional results in the form of the *First preference votes counted* report may be generated and shared with you throughout the count, using the below table as a guide to frequency:

Estimated count duration	Less than 1 hour	1 to 3 hours	More than 3 hours
Data extraction frequency	End of count only	1.5 hours and end of count	1.5 hours, then minimum of every 3 hours, and end of count

The election manager will post a copy of the report in an accessible location within the venue for you to view.

Result reports should not be shared with anyone other than your candidate (e.g. the media or other interested parties) until they are officially announced or published by the VEC.

2. Ballot paper details report

During the count the *Ballot paper details* report may be used by the computer count team leader when auditing batches. Upon request, the election manager can provide a copy of this report to candidates.

When election material has been sealed and stored after the declaration, the data will no longer be available.

More information on the reports available to candidates and scrutineers for computer counts can be found in the *Availability of results guide* online at vec.vic.gov.au, or from the election manager by request.

4.7 Formality of votes

For a vote to be formal, it must have:

- a number 1 in or next to the box for the voters most preferred candidate
- numbers in all the remaining boxes.

The only exception is if one box is blank but would logically contain the last number of the sequence. For example, a ballot paper with six candidates, where numbers 1 to 5 are written but the 6th box is empty, counts as a formal vote.

A vote is informal if it:

- has more than one blank box
- is missing a number in the middle of the sequence (for example, numbers 1 to 3 and 5 to 8 are written, 4 is missing)
- repeats any numbers
- uses ticks or crosses
- uses a zero.

Letters such as 'a, b, c, d' are not accepted as a formal vote. Roman numerals are acceptable, but they must follow the same rules for a formal vote listed above.

Numbers next to or on the other side of the candidates' names are acceptable if the voter's intention is clear. Amendments are also allowed in this case. All other marks are ignored.

More information on ballot paper formality is available in [Appendix 5. Ballot paper formality rules](#).

4.8 Adjournment

The election manager can suspend the extraction of ballot papers or the count of votes. This can occur for reasons such as:

- it is the end of the day and the venue must be packed up so counting can continue at a later date (usually the next day)
- an emergency or natural disaster.

If counting or ballot paper extraction is suspended, the election manager will inform all scrutineers that are present. Your candidates will be notified by email of the time, location and additional details (such as the scrutineer quota) for resuming the activity.

If counting or ballot paper extraction is adjourned for any reason, all ballot material will be packed and securely stored.

4.9 Recount of votes

A recount can be conducted any time after the provisional results have been calculated but before the declaration of the result. A recount involves the election manager opening a sealed parcel or parcels containing ballot papers to recount them:

- if they think it is necessary, or
- if a candidate submits a request in writing, and the election manager is satisfied the reasons given by the candidate may have affected the election result.

A candidate can only request a recount following the completion of the counting activities and up until declaration. Any request received outside of this period will be rejected.

Candidates are not allowed to be present at a recount. They can appoint scrutineers to represent their interests at a recount.

The election manager:

- can conduct one or more recounts
- may recount specific parcels of ballot papers (partial recount) or all ballot papers (full recount)
- will make reasonable efforts to inform candidates before they conduct a recount
- may reverse any decision on any ballot paper (during a recount only).

A partial recount usually involves reviewing the informal ballot papers and considering whether they may be counted as formal. Any previously informal ballot papers that are found to be formal can be returned to the count.

The election manager will consider several factors when deciding to conduct a recount, including:

- any close margins at critical points during the preference distribution
- any procedural or system errors or failures that may have interrupted or interfered with the counting process
- the accessibility of the counting process for scrutineers to properly perform their duties.

The result of a recount supersedes the original count.

5. Electoral compliance – scrutineers

Overview

This chapter describes the offences that exist for local council elections relevant to scrutineers.

5.1 Offences

The following list of offences is not exhaustive and should not be taken as legal advice.

Refer to the Act and the Regulations for more information about electoral offences. We encourage you to seek independent legal advice if you are concerned about any of these offences.

Removal of scrutineers from a venue

As a scrutineer, you may be removed from a venue if:

- you commit any breach of the Act or the Regulations
- you handle any ballot papers
- you disrupt or hinder election activities, or behave in a disorderly manner
- you fail to obey a lawful direction from an election official.

False or misleading declaration

Under section 293 of the Act, it is an indictable offence to knowingly make a false written or spoken statement in a significant matter about voter enrolment or any declaration or application (such as an *Appointment and declaration of scrutineer* form) under the Act or the Regulations.

The maximum penalty is 600 penalty units or 5 years imprisonment.

Tampering

Under section 296 of the Act, it is an indictable offence to:

- open any sealed envelope containing a ballot paper, or break the seal or open any ballot box or parcel sealed under the Act or the Regulations, or
- deal with any ballot papers, voters' rolls or other material used at an election under the Act or the Regulations.

This does not apply to a person authorised by the Act or the Regulations.

The maximum penalty is 600 penalty units or 5 years imprisonment.

Secrecy of vote

Except as authorised by law, it is an offence under section 297 of the Act for a person who is present when a voter votes to:

- ascertain or disclose by word, act or other means, the vote of the voter, or
- directly or indirectly require, induce or attempt to induce the voter to show how the voter intends to vote, or
- communicate with or assist the voter while voting, or
- look at the voter's vote or ballot paper.

The maximum penalty is 120 penalty units or one year imprisonment.

Interfering with postal ballots

Under section 299 of the Act, it is an indictable offence to interfere with any postal ballot material that will be sent or delivered to a voter by the VEC at an election.

This does not apply to a person who is acting with the authority of the VEC.

The maximum penalty is 600 penalty units or 5 years imprisonment.

Interference with rights

Under section 301(1) of the Act, it is an indictable offence for a person to hinder or interfere with the free exercise or performance of any other person's political right or duty relevant to an election.

The maximum penalty is 600 penalty units or 5 years imprisonment.

6. Feedback and complaints

Overview

This chapter provides information on our elections complaint process.

6.1 Responding to feedback and complaints

The VEC has a customer feedback and complaints process for receiving and responding to feedback and complaints. This is detailed in our customer feedback policy and our customer service charter, available online at vec.vic.gov.au/complaints

Please submit your feedback or complaints to our Customer Feedback and Complaints team. You can do this:

- using the online tool at vec.vic.gov.au/complaints
- in writing to complaints@vec.vic.gov.au
- in writing to the election manager of the council in which you have been appointed as a scrutineer (only while the election office is open)
- by mail to Level 11, 530 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000. Please address your letter to Customer Feedback and Complaints team.

Feedback and complaint processing

We will review all written feedback or complaints we receive.

The content of the submission will determine who reviews and actions it. If the feedback or complaint:

- alleges an offence against the Act, it will be referred to the relevant enforcement agency (such as the Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) for candidate offences, or the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) for alleged offences of a current councillor)
- alleges a breach of local laws, it will be referred to the relevant council CEO
- alleges a criminal offence, it will be referred to Victoria Police
- relates to the administration of the election, including the actions and behaviours of election managers or their staff, it will be referred to the Electoral Commissioner or another authorised person for investigation and response.

If the matter has been referred externally, the VEC will advise the customer that the matter has been referred. In some cases, it may also be appropriate for us to notify the subject of the feedback or complaint that a matter has been raised, particularly where further information is necessary.

You may enquire about the progress of your submission by contacting the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team on 131 832 or 03 8620 1100.

This page is intentionally left blank.

Appendix 1. Appointment and declaration of scrutineer form

Appointment and declaration of scrutineer

Before completing this form

- A candidate can sign this original form by hand, or can sign by:
 - digitally pasting a copy of the candidate's signature into the form
 - signing a PDF on a tablet, smartphone or laptop using the 'draw' option (not a typed signature)
 - signing and scanning a hardcopy.
- Scrutineers should make sure you have read the Scrutineer handbook on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au/scrutineer-council-election. It includes further details about this form, and useful information on scrutineer activities and expected behaviours.
- It is an offence under the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) (**the Act**) to make a statement that you know is false or misleading in any declaration or application in relation to an election under the Act or the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020* (Vic) (**the Regulations**). This includes spoken statements or statements in writing. For more information see section 293(1) of the Act.

Council and ward

Election date
 / /

Candidate first and last name

Scrutineer first and last name

1 Appointment of a scrutineer
 Candidate to complete. Please use BLOCK LETTERS.

I appoint Scrutineer name of Scrutineer residential address

to be a scrutineer at Venue scrutineer will be attending for the election on the above date.

Candidate signature Date / /

2 Scrutineer declaration
 Scrutineer to complete in the presence of an election official. Please use BLOCK LETTERS.


I Scrutineer name, scrutineer for Candidate name

at the election for the council ward named above, declare that:

- I agree to be a scrutineer for the above candidate.
- I am eligible to be a scrutineer under the Act and the Regulations.
 I am aware that a person cannot be appointed as a scrutineer if they are:
 - a councillor of the council the candidate has nominated in
 - a candidate in this election or any other election for this council, held on the same day
 - an election official for the VEC.
- I agree to obey all legal requirements in my capacity as a scrutineer.
- I agree to follow all requirements set out in the *Conditions of entry for scrutineers*, outlined in the *Scrutineer handbook*.
- I am aware it is an offence for a scrutineer to:
 - interfere with, or attempt to influence, any elector
 - communicate with any person except so far as is necessary for the role
 - handle any ballot papers.
- I will not disclose any fact coming to my knowledge which I am required not to disclose according to the Act and the Regulations
- While performing the role as a properly appointed scrutineer I will not use any device to record or photograph:
 - a ballot paper
 - a declaration or form
 - any agent, appointee, contractor, or employee of the VEC (including election managers and election officials).
- I am aware that failing to meet the conditions of this declaration may result in action taken against me, including (but not limited to) removal from the venue or prosecution.

Scrutineer signature Date / /

M307 (1 / 2)

 Victorian Electoral Commission

Appendix 2. Registration checklist

To register as a scrutineer:	✓
Read the <i>Scrutineer handbook</i> available online at vec.vic.gov.au/scrutineer-council-election	
Complete an <i>Appointment and declaration of scrutineer</i> form, available from the election, online at vec.vic.gov.au/scrutineer-council-election or in the <i>Candidate information kit</i>	
Ensure your candidate has signed the form	
Bring an <i>Appointment and declaration of scrutineer</i> form to the venue that is signed by the candidate	
Sign the declaration section of the form in front of an election official at registration	
Listen to the scrutineer briefing for information on your role	
Listen to the activity briefing for information on the activity you are observing	
You must follow all rules at the venue and follow the instructions of election managers and election officials.	

Appendix 3. Scrutineer rights and responsibilities poster

Scrutineer rights and responsibilities

As a scrutineer:

- You can observe all aspects of ballot paper processing for the council or ward election you have been appointed to observe.
- You can observe the activities outlined below and challenge an election official's decision on the formality of ballot papers during **manual counts**, **computer counts** and **recounts**.


Activity ...	You can ...
Posting of ballot packs	Observe
Opening and emptying a ballot box	Observe
Opening and emptying a post office box	Observe
Receipt and processing of returned ballot paper envelopes	Observe
Ballot paper extraction	Observe
Manual count	Observe, challenge
Computer count	Observe, challenge
Recount	Observe, challenge

Challenging ballot paper formality

- While observing **manual counting**, you can disagree with the decision of an election official to count a ballot paper by immediately calling 'Challenge' and alerting the election official and/or the counting team leader to the nature of your challenge.
- While observing **computer counting**, you can:
 - disagree with the data entry of a ballot paper by noting the batch number and ballot paper number of the ballot paper you are disputing, and raising it with the computer count team leader.
 - disagree with the decision of the election manager or assigned election official when reviewing informal ballot papers by immediately calling 'Challenge' and alerting the election manager or assigned election official to the nature of your challenge.
- You can challenge the decision to admit or reject a ballot paper, the formality of a ballot paper, or an election official's reading of preferences on a ballot paper.
- At a **recount**, challenged ballot papers will be reserved for decision by the election manager.
- The election manager's decision on a challenged ballot paper is final.


You must not touch a ballot paper, impede a count, or prevent an election official or another scrutineer from performing their duties.

You may be removed from the venue, with or without warning, if you do not follow an election official's instructions.



Scan the QR code for more information

STAT-LG-POSTER02



Victorian Electoral Commission

Appendix 4. Conditions of entry for scrutineers poster

Conditions of entry for scrutineers


Dos and don'ts of scrutineering

Do:

- Have the correct forms to access the activity you are here to observe.
- Participate in the required briefings provided to all scrutineers.
- Only enter the activity space when ballot material for your candidate's election is being processed.
- Keep your scrutineer lanyard visible at all times.
- Follow all the instructions of election managers and election officials.
- Behave courteously and professionally towards venue staff.

Don't:

- Communicate with anyone in the venue except when it is necessary for your scrutineer role.
- Touch ballot paper envelopes or ballot papers.
- Observe activities you are not registered and signed-in for.
- Distract election officials from performing their roles, such as by talking loudly, talking on mobile phones, or not giving election officials enough space to perform their duties.
- Obstruct or delay activities, or behave in a disorderly manner.
- Share results with anyone other than your candidate (e.g., the media or other interested parties) until they are officially announced or published by the VEC.



Scan the QR code for more information

Use of electronic devices – restriction on recording

You can use an electronic device as long as it doesn't interfere with election activities. Please step away from the activity to use a mobile phone as it can be distracting.

While you are a scrutineer you must not use an electronic device or any other device to record or photograph:

- ballot papers
- declarations
- forms
- any VEC employee, agent, appointee, or contractor. This includes election managers and officials.

Electronic devices that must not be used to record or photograph include mobile phones, smart watches, tablets, laptops, cameras, video recorders, or any other technology that can record, save and transmit images and footage.


Penalties

Any misconduct or failure to obey the lawful directions of an election official is an offence and you may be removed from the venue.

Some offences are subject to a penalty of up to 600 penalty units or 5 years prison sentence. Please read the *Scrutineer handbook* for more information on offences.

The rules relating to scrutineer behaviour are detailed in the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*, the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)*, and determinations issued by the VEC, which can be found on our website at vec.gov.au/determinations

STAT-LG-POSTER01



**Victorian
Electoral
Commission**

Appendix 5. Ballot paper formality rules

1. Ballot papers must have all boxes numbered using the full sequence of numbers (starting with 1) indicated on the ballot paper to be considered formal.
2. The only exception is where one box is left blank and would logically have contained the last number (such as when there are 6 candidates and the number 6 is the only missing number).
3. Ballot papers must have a number 1 in, adjacent to, or level with, one box to be considered formal.
4. Numbers next to names are acceptable providing the voter's intention is clear.
5. Amendments are acceptable providing the voter's intention is clear. All other marks are to be ignored.
6. Unconventional but recognisable numbers, such as continental 1s and 7s and roman numerals are acceptable.

Recognisable numbers	
ONE	SEVEN
<i>í</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>l</i>	<i>7</i>
<u><i>1</i></u>	<i>7</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>VII</i>

7. Numbers may be spelled out (for example one, two, three, etc.), but only in English.
8. Damaged ballot papers are formal if the voter had access to all candidate information on the ballot paper when recording their preferences.
9. Poorly formed numbers must be considered in the context of the whole ballot paper and are acceptable if they can reasonably be construed as numbers in the sequence.
10. More than one blank box makes the ballot paper informal.
11. A number missing from the sequence makes the ballot paper informal.
12. A number other than the last number in the sequence missing makes the ballot paper informal.
13. A duplicated number makes the ballot paper informal.
14. If the number '0' (zero) is included, the ballot paper is informal.
15. Ticks, crosses, As and Bs, etc., are not acceptable as indicators of preference.
16. Damaged ballot papers are informal if any candidate information or preferences are not visible.

Each sample ballot paper is numbered to demonstrate the corresponding formality rule.

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

6

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

The numbers are consecutive, starting at 1

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

2

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

Only one box left blank, clearly last preference

1. All boxes should be numbered using the full sequence of numbers as indicated on the ballot paper.
2. The only exception is where one box is left blank and would logically have contained the last preference.

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

2

CANDIDATE, Name

✓1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

Even though there is a tick, number 1 is clear

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

2

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

Numbers outside boxes are still clearly allocated

3. Each ballot paper must have a number 1 in, adjacent to, or level with one box.
4. Numbers next to names are acceptable if the voter's intention is clear.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

4

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

2*

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

The correction is clear

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

II

CANDIDATE, Name

III

CANDIDATE, Name

I

CANDIDATE, Name

V

CANDIDATE, Name

IV

CANDIDATE, Name

VI

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

All figures clearly represented in unconventional format

5. Amendments are acceptable if the voter’s intention is clear. All other marks are ignored.
6. Unconventional but recognisable numbers (e.g. Roman numerals or continental numbers) are acceptable.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

one

CANDIDATE, Name

five

CANDIDATE, Name

two

CANDIDATE, Name

four

CANDIDATE, Name

six

CANDIDATE, Name

three

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

Written numbers are acceptable

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

6

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

Candidate information and preferences are discernible

7. Numbers may be written (one, two, three, etc.), but non-English words or characters are not acceptable.
8. Voter had access to all candidate information on the ballot paper when recording preferences.

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

6

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Formal

Numbers can be determined taking the whole ballot paper into account

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

5

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

9

CANDIDATE, Name

9

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

Numbers in the third and fourth boxes are not distinguishable

9a. Poorly formed numbers are acceptable if they can reasonably be construed as part of the sequence.

9b. Poorly formed numbers must be considered in the context of the whole ballot paper.

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

2

CANDIDATE, Name

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

More than one box left blank

Sample City Council
Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

4

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

7

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

Sequence broken between 2 and 4 (3 is missing)

10. More than one box left blank makes the ballot paper informal.

11. Any omission of a number from the sequence makes the ballot paper informal.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

The number 4 has
been omitted from the
sequence

12. Any omission of a number from the sequence makes the ballot paper informal.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

2

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

The number 4
appears twice

13. Any duplicate of a number in the sequence makes the ballot paper informal.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

4

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

0

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

Sequence must be
1, 2, 3 etc. Zero (0) is
not permitted

14. '0' (zero) makes the ballot paper informal as it is outside range of numbers in the instructions.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

2

CANDIDATE, Name

✓

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

5

CANDIDATE, Name

6

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

No number one

15a. Ticks, crosses, As and Bs, etc., are not acceptable as indicators of preference. Must have a number 1.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

×

CANDIDATE, Name

×

CANDIDATE, Name

/

CANDIDATE, Name

×

CANDIDATE, Name

×

CANDIDATE, Name

×

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

Sequence stops after number one

15b. Ticks, crosses, As and Bs, etc., are not acceptable as indicators of preference.

Sample City Council

Sample Ward

Election of 1 Councillor

Number the boxes 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.
Number every box to make your vote count.
You must not use any number more than once.

6

CANDIDATE, Name

2

CANDIDATE, Name

4

CANDIDATE, Name

1

CANDIDATE, Name

3

CANDIDATE, Name

CANDIDATE, Name

Informal

The number 5 is missing

16. Candidate information or preferences are not visible.

This page is intentionally left blank.

This page is intentionally left blank.

© **State of Victoria**

(Victorian Electoral Commission)

June 2025

This work, Local council elections Scrutineer handbook, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence [<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>]. You are free to share this work under that licence, on the condition that you do not change any content and you credit the State of Victoria (Victorian Electoral Commission) as author and comply with the other licence terms. The licence does not apply to any branding, including Government logos.



Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000

T 131 832

info@vec.vic.gov.au

vec.vic.gov.au
