

# 4 How Do We Vote?

Students will be able to explain the unique Vote by Mail process we use here in Washington.

(30 - 45 minutes)

## Elementary, Middle & High School Lesson

1. In Washington, citizens must register if they want to vote but are *not* asked to state a party preference (p. 25). Some states don't require their voters to register at all, while others have additional requirements such as proof of citizenship or declaring affiliation with a political party. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these other systems?
2. Washington votes by mail. Ballots are sent to voters' homes two weeks before Election Day. Voters complete their ballot, sign the envelope, and mail it back. An advantage of vote by mail is that Washington has higher voter turnout than most other states. In many other states, citizens have just one day to vote in person at the polls unless they have special permission to vote in advance. Also, our voters don't have to wait in line. In 2012, people in other states complained that long lines at the polls prevented citizens - especially minorities - from voting. Some voters waited six hours! MIT professor Charles Stewart concluded in his study that, "The findings don't suggest discrimination on an individual basis, but rather a failure in urban areas with high levels of minority voters to appropriately address the issue of long lines" (p. 23).
3. In a vote by mail state like ours, before a returned ballot is counted, the voter's signature on the outer envelope is checked against their registration signature. The inner envelope, called the security envelope, separates the voter's signature from the ballot to make sure votes stay confidential. After the signature is verified, the ballot is taken out of the security envelope and scanned by the tabulation machine. All the votes are added up at 8 p.m. on Election Day (p. 24).
4. To demonstrate how signature verification is used to identify voters and prevent election fraud, ask students to complete the signature verification exercise (pp. 26-27).
5. Answers for the signature verification worksheet:  
1-G, 2-J, 3-B, 4-I, 5-F, 6-E, 7-D, 8-A, 9-C, 10-H



## Primary Sources

Voter registration form  
(pp. 53-54)

MIT study on voting  
wait times (p. 23)

### **vote by mail**

*ballots are sent to registered voters before each election, and voters return their ballots by mail or to an official drop box*

### **poll**

*a place for voting, often a school or church*

### **signature verification**

*identification through signature comparison*

### **voter registration form**

*a citizen's application to vote in specific districts based on their address*

### **ballot**

*a piece of paper used for voting, marked by a voter to show his preference for a candidate or course of action (like a multiple choice test)*

Sample Precinct  
Ballot Code 4  
Leg District 14

**Official Ballot – Sample County, WA**  
**General Election November 6, 2222**

**Instructions to voters:** Fill in the oval next to your choice. Vote like this:

**If you make a mistake:** Draw a line through the entire candidate's name like this: ~~George Washington~~  
You then have the option of making another choice if you wish.

<p><b>State Representative District 14, Position #1</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Teddy Roosevelt <i>(Prefers Bull Moose Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Abigail S. Adams <i>(Prefers Federalist Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> William Henry Harrison <i>(Prefers Whig Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Write-in</p>	<p><b>State Representative District 14, Position #2</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Dolley Payne Madison <i>(Prefers Democratic-Republican Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Rosa Parks <i>(Prefers Democratic Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Dwight D. Eisenhower <i>(Prefers Republican Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Write-in</p>
<p><b>Englewood Fire District Commissioner</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Wing Luke <i>(Prefers Democratic Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Thurgood Marshall <i>(Prefers Democratic Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Sacagawea <i>(States No Party Preference)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Write-in</p>	<p><b>Water District 12 Commissioner</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> James Monroe <i>(Prefers Democratic-Republican Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Elisha P. Ferry <i>(Prefers Republican Party)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Clara Barton <i>(States No Party Preference)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Write-in</p>

◀ Sample ballot

### Longer Lines at the Polls for Minority Voters

	Average Wait (Minutes)
National	13
African American	23
Hispanic	19
Caucasian	12
Republican	11
Democrat	16

Source: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014

## Homework

Ask students to discuss the vote by mail system with an adult and write down their thoughts following the conversation.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of vote by mail?

Would you be willing to vote online? Why or why not?

## Assessment Questions

**Elementary:** Ask an adult why they think people don't vote.

**Middle & High School** (students may choose):

- As seen in the chart above, minority voters in other states can face long lines at poll sites. What challenges does our vote by mail system present to minority voters?
- Some states allow "same-day registration," meaning voters can register and vote at the polls. Because Washington votes by mail, our voters must register in advance so they have time to receive a ballot. Which is better for young voters: more time to register or more time to vote?

# COUNTING YOUR BALLOT

## 1 Your county receives your ballot

Deposit your ballot in an official drop box by 8 p.m. on Election Day, or return your ballot by mail - but make sure it's postmarked no later than Election Day!



## 2 Your ballot is sorted

Election staff scan the envelope bar code to find your signature in the state database.



## 3 Your signature is verified

The signature on your ballot is compared to the signature on your voter registration record. If the signature matches, you are credited for voting to ensure only one ballot is counted for you.



If the signature doesn't match or is missing, election staff will contact you before your ballot is processed.



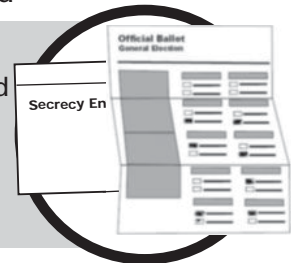
## 4 Envelopes are separated

The return envelope is opened and the security envelope is removed. The envelopes are separated to ensure the secrecy of your vote.



## 5 Your ballot is reviewed

Election staff review every ballot to verify voters followed the instructions. If a ballot can't be read by the scanner, the votes are copied onto a new ballot.



## 6 Your ballot is counted

Starting at 8 p.m. on Election Day all ballots are counted. Ballots will be counted over the next several days.



**IN THE 2016  
General Election**

**3,363,440**

ballots were counted in Washington State

# 5 WAYS VOTING IS UNIQUE IN WA

1

## Top 2 Primary

Washington uses a Top 2 Primary system, rather than a party nominating system. In our Top 2 Primary, the two candidates who receive the most votes advance to the General Election regardless of their party preference.



2

## No party affiliation

As a Washington voter, you do not register by party affiliation. This allows you to vote for any candidate in the Primary, regardless of their party preference.



3

## Online voter registration

Washington offers online voter registration. Register to vote or update your address at [www.myvote.wa.gov](http://www.myvote.wa.gov).



4

## Vote by mail

Washington State votes by mail. We are one of three states in the nation to eliminate poll sites. A ballot is mailed 18 days before each election, ensuring you have time to cast an informed ballot without waiting in line.



5

## Voters' Pamphlet

Only a few states produce a Voters' Pamphlet like ours. In Washington, a pamphlet is mailed to every household before each General Election in November.



**Learn more about voting at**

**[WWW.VOTE.WA.GOV](http://WWW.VOTE.WA.GOV)**

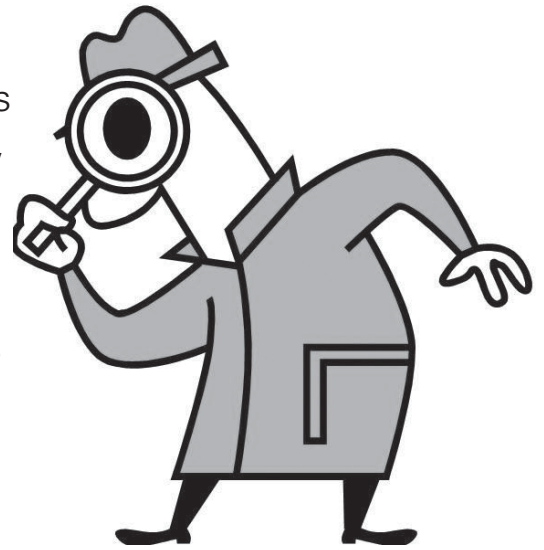
# Washington Votes by Mail

Here in Washington, we vote by mail. Ballots are sent to voters' homes two weeks before Election Day. Voters complete their ballot, sign the envelope, and mail it back. But how do election staff know it's really you who voted your ballot?

Like your fingerprints, your signature is unique to you. Signatures are very difficult to copy exactly. Election staff receive special training from the Washington State Patrol to compare signatures quickly and accurately.

Before votes are counted, election staff first compare every signature on the ballot envelopes to the signatures in the voter registration records. If the signatures match, the votes are counted. More than 3 million people vote in Washington's elections. That's a lot of signatures!

Verifying signatures is like being a detective; you've got to study the clues to find a match. Here are some of the clues election staff look for.



**Clues**

**Spacing**  
Is the space between letters even, narrow, or wide?

**Continuity**  
Are the letters all connected, or are there breaks between?

**Ticks**  
Are there any hooks or spurs?

## Samples

raccoon (narrow)

raccoon (connected)

raccoon (spur and hook)

spur ——— *r* ——— *n* ——— hook

# Handwriting Analysis

Can you identify people by their handwriting? Draw a line between the matching samples.

1 *walrus*

2 *Walrus*

3 *Walrus*

4 *Walrus*

5 *Walrus*

6 *Walrus*

7 *walrus*

8 *walrus*

9 *walrus*

10 *walrus*

A *walrus*

B *walrus*

C *walrus*

D *walrus*

E *walrus*

F *Walrus*

G *walrus*

H *walrus*

I *walrus*

J *walrus*

