

## What are ballot papers for?

Ballot papers are the basic building blocks of elections. They are used to translate the intentions of voters into something that can be counted to give an election result.

Most of the election process is concerned with working out who is entitled to receive a ballot paper, how to give them their ballot papers, how to collect them and how to count them.

## Ballot papers for the ACT Legislative Assembly

For ACT Legislative Assembly elections, the ACT is divided into 3 electorates, with the electorates of Brindabella and Ginninderra each electing 5 Members, and the electorate of Molonglo electing 7 Members. Each electorate has its own ballot paper.

The Legislative Assembly is elected using the Hare-Clark electoral system. This is a multi-member proportional representation electoral system, with 5 or 7 candidates to be elected from each ballot paper. Because more than one candidate is elected from each ballot paper, political parties typically put forward several candidates in each electorate.



Candidates' names are listed on the ballot papers in columns. Candidates nominated by registered political parties are listed in party columns, with the name of the party shown at the top of the column. Independent candidates are included in one or more "ungrouped" columns on the ballot papers.

Where a registered party nominates only one party candidate in an election, that candidate is also included in an ungrouped column.

The order in which columns are printed on ballot papers is determined by a random draw conducted by the Electoral Commissioner. The "ungrouped" column (or columns) always appears on the right-hand side of the ballot paper.

The names in each column are listed using the "Robson rotation" method (see overleaf).

A sample ballot paper as used at the 2004 Legislative Assembly election is shown on the last page of this *factsheet*.

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## Formal votes and informal votes

For ACT Legislative Assembly elections, a “formal” ballot paper is one that is correctly marked by a voter to show at least one first preference. A formal vote can be included in the count to determine which candidates are elected. An “informal” vote is one that is not correctly completed by the voter. An informal vote cannot be included in the count to elect candidates.

After the polls close for an election, the first task undertaken is to open the ballot boxes, extract the completed ballot papers and sort them into “formal” and “informal” votes.

Rules for checking the formality of ballot papers fall into two categories: rules to determine whether the ballot paper is an authentic one cast by a person entitled to vote, which does not identify the voter; and rules to determine whether the voter has marked the ballot paper sufficiently well for it to be accepted.

A ballot paper is classed as informal if the officer in charge of the count is not satisfied that it is authentic. Normally, every ballot paper is printed with a colour screen and a security device. Ballot papers that have been fraudulently copied will be readily apparent, and will be set aside as informal.

Postal votes and other special votes (such as a vote marked by a person whose name cannot be found on the electoral roll) have to be enclosed in “declaration envelopes” signed by the voters. These envelopes need to be checked to determine whether the person is entitled to vote before the ballot papers inside them can be counted. These ballot papers have the word “Declaration” printed on them. Any declaration votes placed in a ballot box without being enclosed in a declaration envelope are classed as informal.

A ballot paper is also classed as informal if it has writing on it by which, in the opinion of the officer in charge of counting, the elector can be identified. This is intended to prevent people “selling” their votes to candidates.

Once the officer in charge is satisfied that a ballot paper is authentic, it is then checked to determine whether it has been marked correctly.

An authentic ballot paper is formal where it has one (and only one) first preference. (While the instructions on the ballot papers ask electors to show preferences for at least as many candidates as there are vacancies, a ballot paper is nevertheless considered formal if it has one (and only one) first preference.)

An authentic ballot paper is informal where:

- it has no first preference marked for a candidate; or
- a first preference is marked for two or more candidates.

A first preference must be indicated with a number. Ticks and crosses are not accepted as first preference marks.

Preferences shown on a formal ballot paper are counted so long as the voter’s intention is clear.

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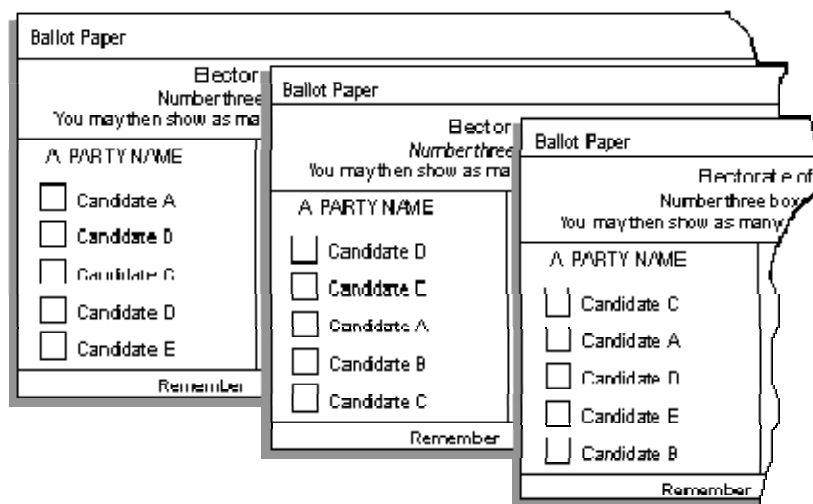
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What is “Robson rotation”?

Robson rotation is a system of listing the names of candidates within columns on a ballot paper in several different orders.

Robson rotation is intended to give each candidate an equal share of each position in a column. This means that political parties are not able to influence the voting outcome by asking for candidates to be listed in a particular order. This allows voters to choose which candidates they want to represent them in an order of their own choosing, rather than an order chosen by a political party.

Robson rotation works like this. If there are 5 candidates in a column, for example, that column will be printed in many different ways, with one-fifth of all ballot papers having candidate "A" in the top position, another fifth of all ballot papers having candidate "B" in the top position, and so on for each candidate in the column, as in this example.



Robson rotation is named after Neil Robson, a member of the Tasmanian House of Assembly who was instrumental in adopting Robson rotation for elections to that House in 1979.

Robson rotation was first used in the Australian Capital Territory with the introduction of the Hare-Clark electoral system in 1995.

With the Robson rotation system, voters wishing to vote for particular candidates must be aware that the order of candidates' names printed on each ballot paper might be different from any order they may have seen on a sample ballot paper or published list of candidates.

## Related *factsheets*

For more information about how ballot papers are used for ACT Legislative Assembly elections, see the **factsheets**:

**Hare-Clark, Casual Vacancies, Voting and Computer Voting.**

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# Sample ballot paper: 2004 ACT Legislative Assembly election: Ginninderra

This is the "ungrouped" column, listing candidates who have not asked to be grouped with any other candidates. Where one candidate only, that candidate is listed in the "ungrouped" column.

This is a "non-party group column" listing candidates who asked to be grouped with any other candidates. "Non-party groups" will not be able to be shown on the ballot paper for the 2008 election.

These are "party" columns, listing candidates nominated by registered political parties, with two or more candidates.

This tells you the minimum number of candidates you should vote for.

**Electorate of Ginninderra**

**Number five boxes from 1 to 5 in the order of your choice**

You may then show as many further preferences as you wish by writing numbers from 6 onwards in other boxes

Ballot Paper	Election of 5 Members	2004	Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
<p><b>A THE ACT GREENS</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meredith HUNTER</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ben O'CALLAGHAN</p>	<p><b>B LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rose PAPPALARDO</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Adam PORTER</p>	<p><b>C ACT DEMOCRATS</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Roslyn DUNDAS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Roberta WOOD</p>	<p><b>D HAROLD HIRD INDEPENDENT</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Harold HIRD</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Julie-Anne PAPATHANASIOU</p>
<b>SAMPLE</b>			
<p><b>E</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> John E. GORMAN</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Darcy HENRY</p>	<p><b>F LIBERAL PARTY</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Iiona FRASER</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Vicki DUNNE</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bob SOBEY</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bill STEFANIAK</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Briant CLARK</p>	<p><b>G FREE RANGE CANBERRA</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Anne MOORE</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mike O'SHAUGHNESSY</p>	<p><b>H AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY, AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Jon STANOPE</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ross MAXWELL</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Wayne BERRY</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Susan MCCARTHY</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mary PORTER</p>
<p><b>I UNGROUPED</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> John SIMMONS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ACT EQUALITY PARTY</p>			

Remember, number at least 5 boxes from 1 to 5 in the order of your choice