Running your own election

First-past-the-post

Easy English September 2008.

Information on the first-past-the-post voting system.

See page 23 for contact details.

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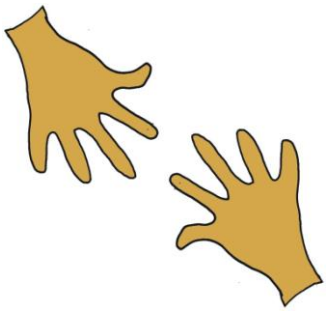
Address all enquiries to the Victorian Electoral Commission, Level 11, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000.

Do you need help?



- This book is written in an ‘easy to read’ way
- The drawings are used to highlight key points
- You may need help to read this information
- You may need help to understand how it relates to you

Ask a friend, family member or support person to help you.

Important - This book talks about first-past-the-post voting in committee of management elections. With this type of voting you tick a box on the ballot paper. In Victoria, you must number every box in the local council, State and Federal elections. If you tick a box on your ballot paper in any local council, State or Federal election your vote will not be counted.

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What is this book about?

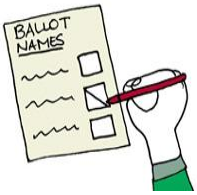
This book will give you information about the first-past-the-post voting system.

The Victorian Electoral Commission is an independent group that runs elections for State Government, Local Councils and other organisations.

Words you will need to know

Ballot box

The finished ballot papers go in a ballot box.



Ballot paper

A piece of paper or card that the voter will fill in. This ballot paper should not be shown to anyone else.

Board/Committee

A group of people that make important decisions for a group or club.

Candidate

Someone that wants to represent people on the board or committee of management.

Represent – To speak and act for something or someone. For example, you choose someone to represent you on the board of your group or club.

Voting – filling in a ballot paper. The voter has made a choice.

What is an election?

An election allows people to say who they want to make important decisions for the group or club.

Why do we have elections?

Your group or club will have a board or committee of management. The board or committee has people:

- who are members of your group or club
- who make important decisions for the rest of your group or club.

The winners of the election will become the board or committee of management.

Who is in charge?

Pick someone to be in charge of the election.

It is important that this person:

- is **not** a candidate in your election
- is **not** related to a candidate in your election
- knows the rules of your election

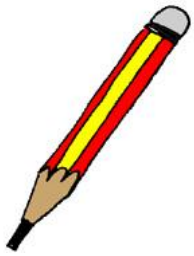
You can ask

- someone who is **not** a member of your group or club
- a member of your local council or community

The person in charge of the election

- makes sure the rules of the election are followed
- can hear any complaints
- should decide what to do about any complaint

How do you make the ballot papers?



When you know who the candidates are you will need to make ballot papers.

The ballot paper usually has:

- instructions for filling out the ballot paper
- the candidates' names
- where to put the ballot paper when they have finished

You need to write instructions at the top of the ballot paper so that voters will know how to fill out the ballot paper.

People should put a tick in the box next to the candidate they want to see represent them.

You could write instructions like:

Put a tick in one box only for the person you would like to make decisions for your group.

What happens if there is only one position?

In first-past-the-post voting, the candidate with the most votes wins. Voters tick a box next to the name of the candidate they want to make decisions for them.

In the example below, there are four candidates – John, Mohammed, Quoc and Maria. If a voter wanted John to make the decisions, they would tick the box next to John's name. Their ballot paper would look like this:

How do you sort the votes when the voter is only choosing one person?

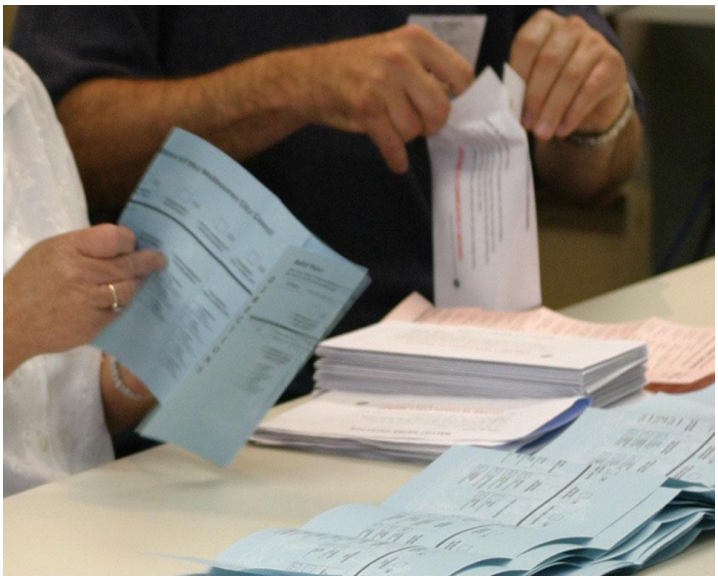
Step 1 – Open the ballot box and count the number of ballot papers. Write down the number of ballot papers.

Step 2 – Put a label with the name of each candidate on the table in front of you.

Step 3 – Look at the ballot papers. Find the name of the candidate that has a tick next to it.

Step 4 – Put the ballot paper next to the same name on the table.

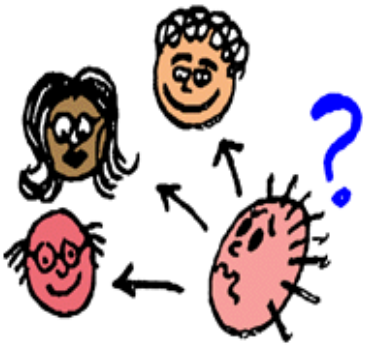
Do this for every ballot paper.



In the example below the voter has put a tick next to the name Quoc. You should put this ballot paper next to the name Quoc on the table.

How do you count the votes when the voter is only choosing one person?

When you have sorted all the votes into piles you can begin to count the votes.



You should ask 2 or 3 people to watch while the votes are being counted. It is important to choose people who are not candidates in the election. These people can support you if someone complains that the counting was not done properly.

When you have counted all the votes in one pile you should write down the number of votes so you do not forget. Do this for all the piles.

When you have finished counting all the votes you will have one person who has more votes than anybody else. This person has won the election.

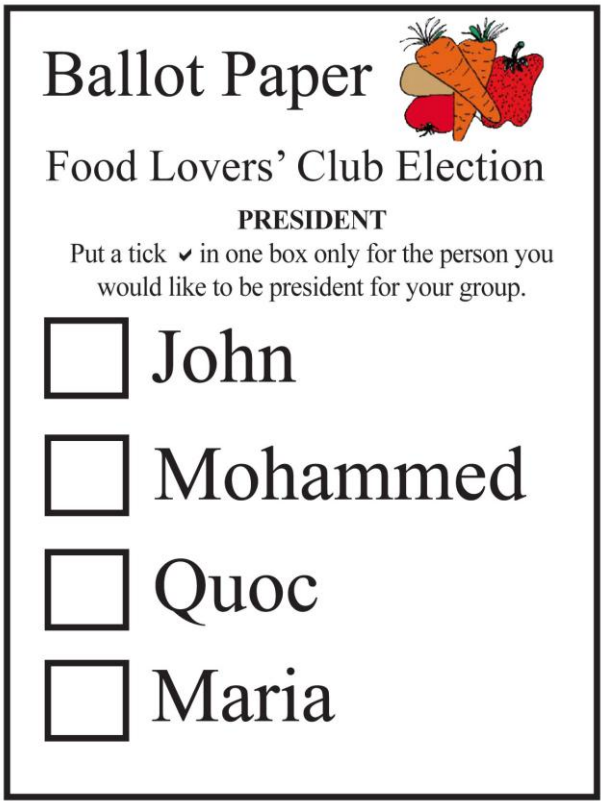
In the example below, Mohammed has the highest number of votes. Mohammed is the winner of the election.

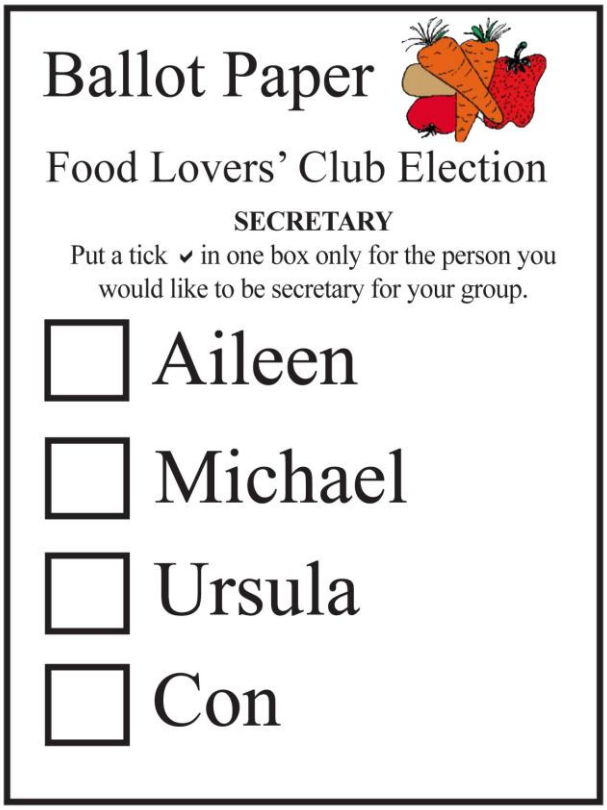
Candidate Name	**Votes**
John	110
Mohammed	165
Quoc	95
Maria	128
Number of votes that you could not count	5
Total Votes =	**503**

The total number of votes should be the same as the number of votes that you counted and wrote down when you opened the box.

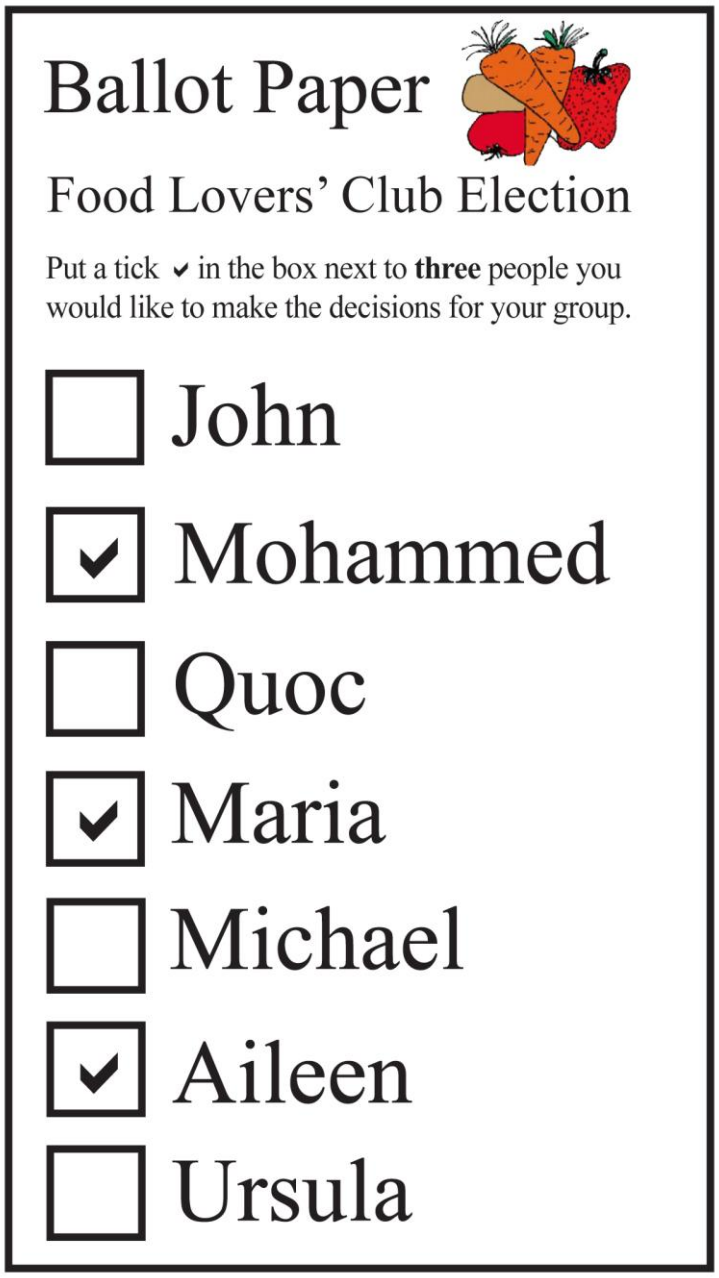
What if there is more than one position?

If there is more than one position to fill, such as President and Secretary, then you can make a ballot paper for each position. The ballot papers might look like this:





Or, if there are several positions on the committee you can put all the names of the candidates on the ballot paper. Voters will then choose the people they most want to represent them. If there are positions to be filled the committee will decide who will fill them. In the case below there are three places on the committee so the voter chooses three people. Their ballot paper might look like this:



How do you sort the votes when the voter is choosing more than one person?

Use these steps if the voter is choosing more than one person on a ballot paper.

Step 1 – Open the ballot box and count the number of ballot papers. Write down the number of votes.

Step 2 – Create a table that has the name of every candidate on it.

Your table will look like this.

Name	**Vote**	**Total**
John		
Mohammed		
Quoc		
Maria		
Michael		
Aileen		
Ursula		
Votes that could not be counted		
	Total	

Step 3 – Look at the ballot papers. Find the names of the candidates with ticks next to them.

Step 4 – For each tick next to a candidate name on the ballot paper make a mark next to their name on the table. Do this for every ballot paper.

How do you count the votes when the voter is choosing more than one person?

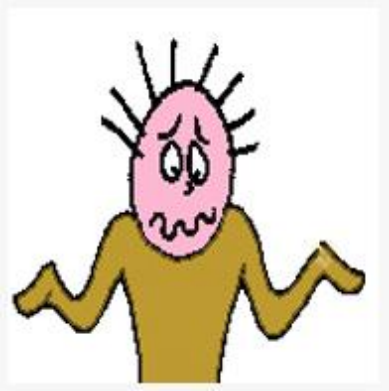
Count up all the marks next to each name.

Your table will look like this.

Name	Vote	Total
John	IIIIIIIII	9
Mohammed	IIIIIIIIIIIII	15
Quoc	IIIII	5
Maria	IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII	20
Michael	IIIIIIIIIII	12
Aileen	IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII	22
Ursula	IIIIIIIIIII	12
Votes that could not be counted		3
	Total	**98**

If there are three spots on the committee the three candidates with the highest score will win. In the table Aileen, Maria and Mohammed have the highest number of votes so they will be on the committee.

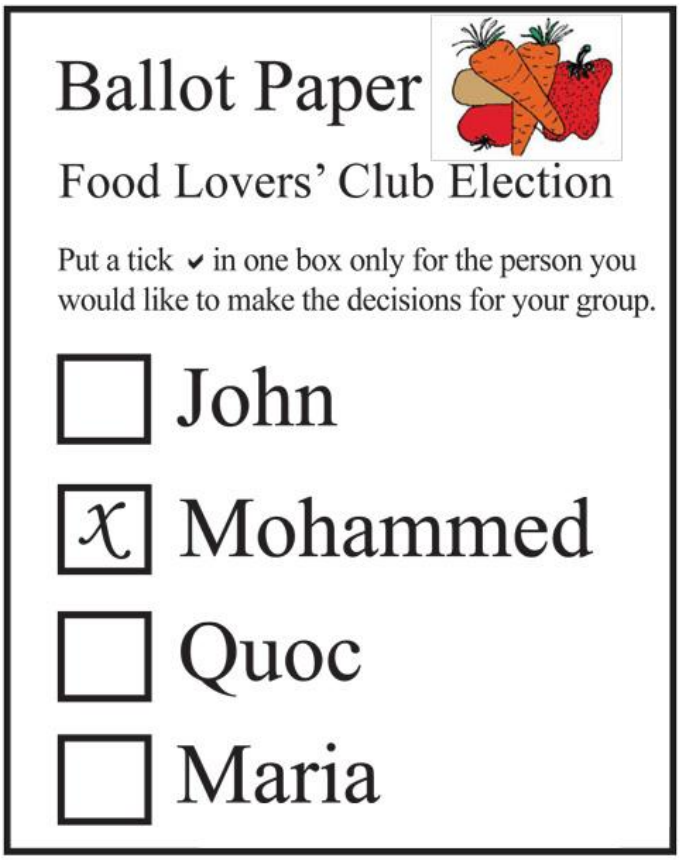
If you are unhappy using this voting method for your election you can use the proportional representation voting method. Call the Victorian Electoral Commission on 13 18 32 for more information.



What should you do if you do not understand a ballot paper?

Sometimes a person may not fill out the ballot paper correctly. If you can be sure who the person is voting for, then you can put their ballot paper in the pile to be counted.

For example:



In the ballot paper above the person has used a cross and not a tick. The voter has only put a cross next to the name of one candidate so it is clear that they would like Mohammed to make the decisions.

Sometimes a ballot paper may not be clear. These are called informal ballot papers. Informal ballot papers cannot be counted in an election because it is not easy to work out who the person has voted for.

Here are some examples of informal ballot papers.

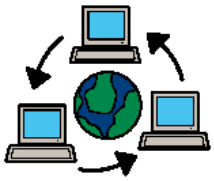
In the example below, the voter has ticked more than one name for one position available. This vote cannot be counted.

In the example below, the voter did not tick any boxes. This vote cannot be counted.

If you are still not sure you can ask the person in charge of the election. This person is responsible for deciding if a ballot paper should be counted. Their decision is final.

More Information

You can get more information from the Victorian Electoral Commission.



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The Communication Resource Centre - Scope, helped the Victorian Electoral Commission write this Easy English Book. Phone 0061 3 9843 2000 www.scopevic.org.au. You can find more information about the Communication Resource Centre at http://www.scopevic.org.au/therapy_crc.html.

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With thanks to the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development, Faculty of VCA, University of Melbourne and especially Jacob Brown, Chook Star, Bindi Jose, Maurial Spearim, Uraine Mastrosavas, Thomas Ray Ahwang, Howard Edwards, Nicole Phillips and Greg Fryer.