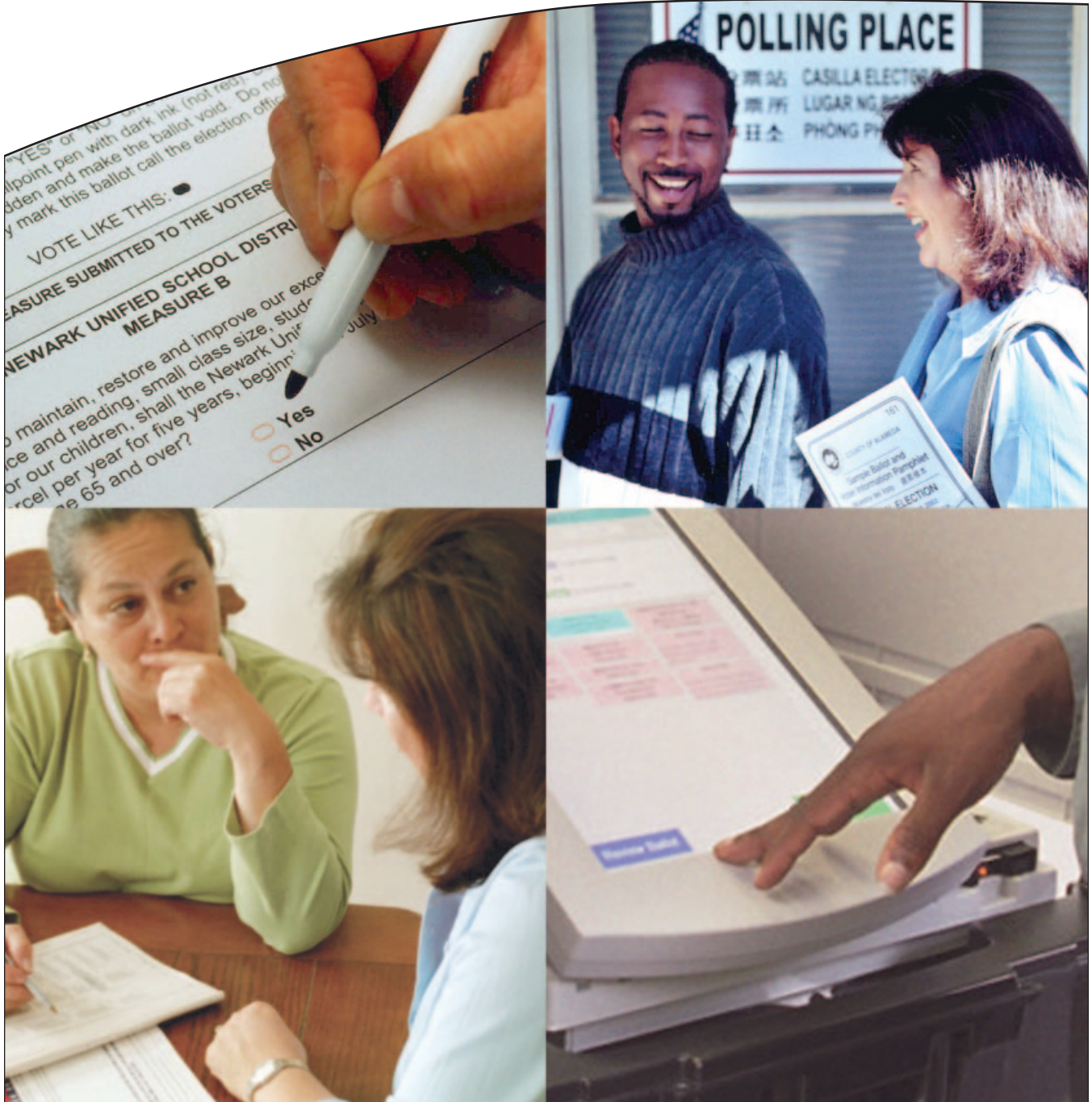


How to Vote!



A WORKBOOK BY STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS

California Edition



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This workbook was put together by adult reading students (also called “learners”) to help other students learn more about voting. We want everyone to have a chance to make their voice heard on the issues they care about.

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Please visit www.easyvoter.org for more information about how to vote and to see the *Easy Voter Guide* for the current election. If you like this workbook, check out our other one: *How to Be Heard and Make a Difference!* It was also written for learners by learners.

Credits

The 2004 update of this workbook was supported in part by the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian. Learner reviewers were Resonja Willoughby and Shaneika Henderson. Proofreader: Ellen Loebel.

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LOOKING AT VOTING



Is there something you would like to change in your community? Voting is one of the ways you can make changes on the issues you believe in. Elections affect who represents you in government, how public money gets spent and what laws are passed.

The right to an equal vote for every citizen is one of the basic values this country was founded on. But many people do not choose to exercise this right. Voting turnout has gone down every year since 1960. Less than 50% of Americans vote in a major election. Half choose to vote. Half choose not to vote.



What do you think?

What are some of the reasons why you might choose to vote?

What are some of the reasons why you might not vote?

List your ideas for each question.

WHY VOTE?	WHY NOT VOTE?
•	•
•	•
•	•

Reasons to vote might include:

- ★ to make a change
- ★ to support a candidate
- ★ it is our right
- ★ to have a say

Reasons not to vote might include:

- ★ not a citizen
- ★ do not know how
- ★ do not understand the ballot
- ★ do not think it makes a difference

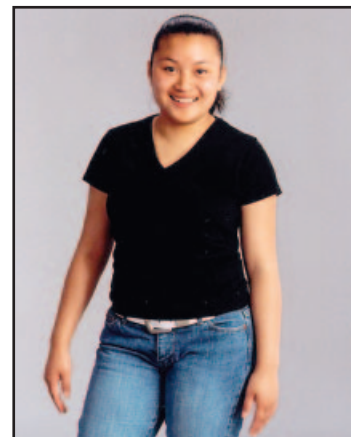
You may also have come up with some other good reasons why to vote or not vote. At the end of this workbook, come back to this list to see if you have a new point of view.

WHO CAN VOTE?

Before you can vote, you have to sign up, or register, to vote. Which of these people is eligible, or allowed, to sign up to vote?

Check the ones you think are eligible to vote.

- Someone who became a U.S. citizen this year.
- An 18 year old student.
- A person with a physical disability.
- Someone in jail for a minor crime (not a felony).
- A citizen who speaks another language besides English.



They *all* can vote.

To be eligible to sign up to vote you must be:

- ★ a U. S. citizen
- ★ at least 18 years old
- ★ not in prison or on parole for a felony

In the past, certain people were not allowed to vote because of their color or sex. You may have heard of literacy tests or a “poll tax” that kept poor people from voting. These things are now against the law.

Over the past 100 years, women, people of color and 18-21 year-olds have all won the right to vote. Any adult citizen who is not in prison or on parole for a felony can vote. We have come a long way!

Answer true or false:

- _____ You do not have to be able to read to vote. You can have someone help you read the ballot. Ballots also come in different languages in many counties.
- _____ You do not have to be able to go to the polling place because you can vote by mail.
- _____ You do not have to have an address to vote. You can put down the two cross streets near where you live.

Surprise! All of these are true.

WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE?



Here are some stories from learners about why they decided to start voting:

Darlene Garcia, *Learner on staff*



I remember when I never used to vote. I always thought my vote would never mean anything. Well, let me tell you, I don't sit back and wait around for things to change.

I have a say and I want to be heard. There are too many people out there just waiting for things to change in our world. Well, by sitting there and not speaking out, nothing is going to change. If we want a future for the next generation, we need to get involved.

Shaneika Henderson, *Learner*



Voting for me was a great experience because it allowed my voice to be heard on the opinions I believe in the most. When I voted, I was confused at first but then I figured it out. I felt good about having voted. Voting will be a number one priority on my list.

Mike Srey, *Learner*



I vote because I like it. I want to see how the new government goes.

I like helping other Cambodian people understand what going to the poll is or who they can vote for.

Bertha Van Dusen, *Learner*

I came to this country from Mexico. I had all the privileges that this country has to offer but one—the right to vote. At every election, I wanted to vote but I could not because I was not an American citizen.

One day I decided that I was going to do it! I received my citizenship. I was so happy that I not only decided to register to vote, but I also work at the polling place every election — presidential or state. I am proud to say that my vote counts and makes a difference.



SIGN UP TO VOTE

You sign up, or **register**, to vote by filling out a registration form. The form is different in each state. This is the form for California. You can get a form at the library, post office, DMV or by calling 1-800-345-VOTE (8683).

Practice filling out the form here.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA VOTER REGISTRATION FORM		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
ARE YOU A U.S. CITIZEN? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If No, Don't Fill Out This Form. Use Black or Blue Ink—Please Print Clearly		
1	Mr. <input type="checkbox"/> FIRST NAME MIDDLE NAME LAST NAME Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/> Miss <input type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	
2	ADDRESS Where You Live (Number, Street, Apartment No.) City County ZIP Code	
3	If No Street Address, Describe Where You Live: (Cross Streets, Route, Box, Section, Township, Range, Etc.)	
4	ADDRESS Where You Get Your Mail (If Different From #2) City State ZIP Code	
5	DATE OF BIRTH (month - day - year) 6 PLACE OF BIRTH (State or Foreign Country)	WARNING: It is a felony if you sign this statement even though you know it is untrue; you can be fined and jailed for up to four years. VOTER DECLARATION—Read and Sign Below. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am a U.S. Citizen. I will be at least 18 years old on or before the next election. I am not in prison or on parole for a felony conviction. I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that all the information on this form is true and correct.
7	TELEPHONE 8 CA DRIVER'S LICENSE OR ID CARD #	
9	E-MAIL ADDRESS	
PARTY REGISTRATION—Check one box <input type="checkbox"/> American Independent Party <input type="checkbox"/> Democratic Party <input type="checkbox"/> Green Party <input type="checkbox"/> Libertarian Party <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Law Party <input type="checkbox"/> Reform Party <input type="checkbox"/> Republican Party <input type="checkbox"/> I Decline to State a Political Party <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____		
10	I prefer election materials in: <i>Prefero materiales electorales en:</i> 我欲索取以下版本的選舉資料 (Check one) (Indique uno) (任劃一項) <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Español <input type="checkbox"/> 中文版 OPTIONAL SURVEY: Can you help in the following area(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Polling Place Worker <input type="checkbox"/> Polling Place Site	12 SIGNATURE—You must sign and date in box below.
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN REGISTERED TO VOTE? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If Yes, give information from last voter registration form.		DATE 01 L 669101 If someone helps fill out or keeps this form, see #13 instructions below.
11	Name _____ Address _____ City _____ County _____ State _____ Political Party _____	13 (1) _____ (2) () _____ (3) _____ (4) _____ (5) ____/____/____ (6) _____ (7) () _____

On this form, you will be asked if you want to join a political party. See the next page for information about the political parties in California.

Someone can help you fill out this form if you want. They just need to fill out #13.

- ★ In California, this form must be sent in at least 15 days before an election.
- ★ Just put the form in the mail. It doesn't even need a stamp.
- ★ It is totally FREE to register to vote!!

After you send in your registration form, you will get a postcard in the mail from your County Elections Office telling you that you are registered. Some people worry that they will be called for jury duty if they register to vote. In fact, the list for jury duty comes from people with driver's licenses and other lists.

Have you moved since the last election? You must re-register every time you move.

POLITICAL PARTIES



When you register, you are asked if you want to join a political party.

What is a political party?

- A group of people who share the same ideas about how the government should be run and what it should do. They pick candidates to run for office.
- It does not cost anything to join a party. You do not have to do anything for the party. If you like, you can help them with their campaigns.
- There are two statewide elections on even years — a spring Primary Election and a fall General Election. In the primary, voters choose candidates from their party for different elected offices.
- In the General Election, winners from the primary run against each other to see who will be elected. Voters can choose candidates from any party.

How do I choose which party to join?

- Pick a party that has the same general views you do. You do not have to agree with everything the party says.
- Or you can choose “decline to state” and not join a party. You may not be able to vote for some party candidates in the primary election.
- You can change your party registration any time. Just fill out a new voter registration form and check a different party box.

There are seven political parties in California. Let's start with the two largest and oldest parties, the Democrats and Republicans:

Democratic



The Democratic Party began around 1828 when Andrew Jackson was elected President. Today, the Democratic Party is interested in social issues. They want government to be more active in helping needy people. Most Democrats believe in:

- more spending on social programs for poor people
- less spending on defense
- programs that promote equal rights for all groups

Republican



The Republican party began in 1854 to fight against slavery. Abraham Lincoln was the first Republican President. Today, the Republican Party wants to reduce the size of government. They believe that many problems can be solved with less government, not more. Most Republicans believe in:

- fewer taxes and rules for businesses and people
- less spending on social programs
- letting businesses create more jobs



POLITICAL PARTIES

There are also five other political parties to choose from in California:

American Independent



This party stands for fewer taxes, less spending and fewer government rules. They think that government should be more local with more control by voters. They want a trade policy that puts America first and believe in traditional moral values.

Green



This party believes in protecting the environment, respect for diversity, fairness and non-violence. They want government to be community-based, with more cooperation and less competition. The Green Party believes all life on our planet is interconnected.

Libertarian



This party stands for personal freedom, property rights and strict limits on government power. They believe that government is the cause of many of our social problems. The Libertarian Party wants to cut taxes and government spending.

Natural Law



This party believes that social transformation can make our government more efficient and citizens more self-governing. They want to expand programs that tap into the intelligence and creativity of Americans as our most important resource.

Peace and Freedom



This party wants to move our society from greed and profit to more cooperation and sharing. They believe in better schools, housing, health-care and childcare, even if it means we need to increase our taxes to pay for these things.

Visit www.easyvoter.org for more information about political parties.

WHAT DID YOU FIND OUT?



★ How many political parties are there in California?

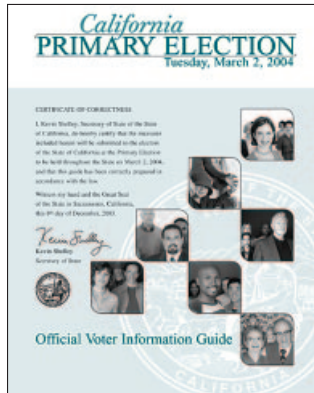
★ Which parties think government should do more to help people?

★ Which parties think government should let people do more things for themselves?

★ Which point of view do you agree with more? Why?

GETTING READY FOR THE ELECTION

After you register to vote, you will receive mail about the election. Some mail may be from the parties or campaigns trying to tell you how to vote. About 2 to 4 weeks before the election, you will also receive this official nonpartisan information:



Voter Information Guide

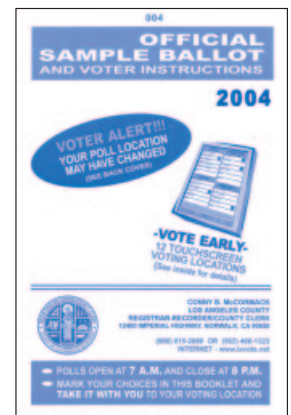
This booklet is mailed to voters by the Secretary of State's office. It tells you about the state candidates and ballot measures.

The Secretary of State is in charge of overall election rules in California and what candidates and measures get on the statewide ballot.

Sample Ballot

This booklet is mailed to all registered voters by their County Elections Office. It lists everything you will be voting on. It also tells you more about the local candidates and ballot measures.

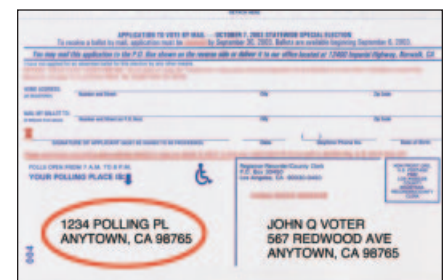
The County Elections Office is in charge of your local polling place, ballots and counting your vote. It can also be called the County Voter Registrar.



To find your polling place

Each voter is assigned one polling place. Look at the back cover of your Sample Ballot. Here is an example of how to find your polling place. Each polling place is also called a precinct.

You can also call your County Elections Office to find your polling place or visit www.easyvoter.org.



HOW TO VOTE



You can choose how you want to vote

- 1.) at your polling place
- 2.) by mail with an “absentee ballot”
- 3.) before Election Day at locations chosen by your County Elections Office



Voting at your polling place



Voting with an absentee ballot

What types of places can be polling places?



At the polling place

Circle all that apply:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| garages | schools |
| community centers | libraries |
| offices | churches |

All of these could be polling places. The polls are open on Election Day between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.



HOW TO VOTE

There are just 3 main steps at the polls

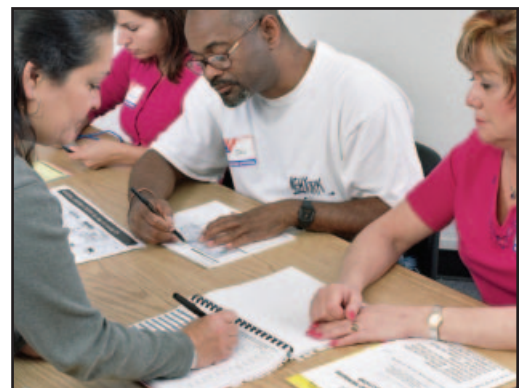
Some counties use paper ballots and some use computers. You can check your Sample Ballot or call your County Elections Office to find out which you will be using.

1. Check in

- ★ you will be asked your name to see if it is on the list of registered voters in your area
- ★ you will sign your name on this list
- ★ if you are a first time voter, you may be asked for identification
- ★ you will be handed a ballot to mark your votes on, or a card to put into the voting computer



Stating your name so it can be found on the list of registered voters



Signing in at the polling place

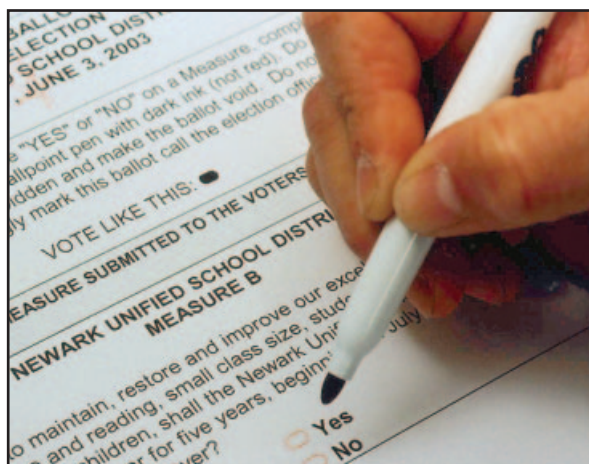


Getting your ballot or computer card



2. Mark your ballot

- ★ you go into a booth to vote in private or stand in front of the computer screen
- ★ you can bring your Sample Ballot with you so you can remember your choices
- ★ you can ask for help if you want
- ★ you don't have to vote on everything
- ★ if you make a mistake, you can ask for another ballot or start over on the computer



Marking your ballot



Voting with a computer

3. Cast your ballot

- ★ if you vote on paper, your ballot goes into a sealed box
- ★ if you vote on a computer system, your vote gets turned in after you look it over and push the “cast ballot” button
- ★ either way, no one sees how you voted

You are done!

Your vote will be counted after the polls close.



Paper ballot goes into a sealed box

HOW TO VOTE

Voting by mail

- ★ To vote by mail, you use an absentee ballot, which means you will be “absent” from the polling place on Election Day.
- ★ To get an absentee ballot, you need to request it in writing from your County Elections Office. The easiest way to do that is to fill out the application form that comes with your Sample Ballot.

Here is an example of an absentee ballot request:

<small>DO NOT SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION IF YOU HAVE ALREADY REQUESTED AN ABSENTEE BALLOT FOR THIS ELECTION NO PRESENTE ESTA SOLICITUD SI YA SOLICITO UNA BALOTA PARA EL VOTO EN AUSENCIA PARA ELECCION</small>				<small>Application Must Be Received By 9/30/03</small> <small>La Solicitud debe recibirse no mas tarde del 30/9/03</small>	
I REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT FOR THE STATEWIDE SPECIAL ELECTION - OCTOBER 7, 2003 SOLICITO UNA BALOTA DE VOTANTE AUSENTE PARA LA ELECCIÓN ELECCIÓN ESTATAL ESPECIAL - 7 DE OCTUBRE DEL 2003					
RESIDENCE ADDRESS DIRECCION DEL DOMICILIO <small>In Sacramento County</small> <small>En el Condado De Sacramento</small>	<small>P.O. Box Not Acceptable/No se acepta Apartado Postal</small>	<small>City/Ciudad</small>	<small>State/Estado</small>	<small>Zip/Código Postal</small>	<small>If you would like to be a Permanent Absentee Voter check box</small> <small>Si usted desea ser un Votante en Ausencia Permanente marque esta casilla</small> <input type="checkbox"/>
MAILING ADDRESS DIRECCION POSTAL	<small>If Different From Residence/Si es Diferente del Domicilio</small>	<small>City/Ciudad</small>	<small>State/Estado</small>	<small>Zip/Código Postal</small>	
MUST SIGN HERE FIRME AQUI 002	<small>I certify under penalty of perjury that this information is true and correct</small> <small>Declaro bajo pena de perjurio que esta información es verdadera y correcta</small> X			<small>Date of Birth</small> <small>Fecha de Nacimiento</small>	<small>Daytime Telephone</small> <small>Teléfono durante el día</small>
	<small>Signature of Applicant</small> <small>Firma del Solicitante</small>	<small>DO NOT PRINT</small> <small>NO ESCRIBA CON LETRA DEMOLDE</small>			



If you do not have the form from your Sample Ballot, you can request an absentee ballot by writing a letter or postcard to your County Elections Office, but be sure to sign it. The Elections Office needs your signature to make sure they do not give your ballot to someone else.

Your absentee ballot request must be received at least 1 week before the election.

You will receive a ballot in the mail to make your choices on. You can take as long as you want at home to mark your ballot. Your family or friends can help you if you like. Be sure to mail your finished ballot back in time to arrive by Election Day. Or, you can drop it off at any polling place in your county on Election Day.

If you vote by mail, you cannot also vote at the polls. Only one vote per person!

WHAT ARE WE VOTING ON?



We vote on two types of things

1. **People** - also called candidates for office
2. **Plans** - new laws put before the voters as ballot measures; these can be for either state or local laws

Making your voting decisions

1. Decide what on the ballot is important to you

A good first step is to look at what is going to be on your ballot, listed on your Sample Ballot. You do not have to vote on everything. Take a look at all the choices to decide which races, candidates and ballot measures you want to learn more about. Think of this as looking at a menu or checking out a buffet table.

2. Get different points of view

There are two kinds of election information:

- ★ **Nonpartisan:** just gives facts; does not take sides about how you should vote
- ★ **Partisan:** gives opinions; may try to convince you how to vote

There are many ways you can get voting information. Put a check next to the three that you like to use the most:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the <i>Easy Voter Guide</i>
written by learners for learners | <input type="checkbox"/> the Sample Ballot and official Voter
Information Guide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family and friends | <input type="checkbox"/> endorsements from groups you trust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV and radio news | <input type="checkbox"/> candidate debates and meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ | |

Which ones did you choose and why? _____

Are they partisan or nonpartisan? _____



YOUR ISSUES

Sometimes people don't vote if they don't hear their issues and interests being covered by the parties or the news media. What are the issues you are most concerned about right now?

Education

HealthCare

Childcare

Housing

Jobs/Wages

Crime

Immigration

Transportation

Other _____

Circle three that are important to you or write your own after "Other." Write about what you think should be done about these issues:

My Issue # 1

My Issue # 2

My Issue # 3

You can let your elected representatives know how you feel about these issues. You can also write to your newspaper or call a radio station to let them know that they should be covering your issue.

EACH VOTE COUNTS



In 1960, it was a very close presidential race. Just three votes per precinct made John F. Kennedy president in 1960 instead of Richard Nixon. In 2000, there was another very narrow presidential victory. In Florida, it was so close that votes were recounted.

Across America, there are many examples of state and local officials being elected with just a few votes difference between the winner and loser.

Describe a time where just one point of view made a difference. Was it yours?

Go back to your list on page 1 about why and why not vote. Has your thinking changed?

**We vote and you can too.
MAKE YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!**





WORDS TO KNOW

Absentee ballot	a ballot used for voting by mail instead of at your polling place
Ballot measures	proposed laws the public is asked to vote on; they are also called propositions.
Candidate	a person who is trying to get elected
Campaign	the work people do to get someone elected or a ballot measure passed
Congress	the branch of our national government that makes laws; it has two parts: the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate
Eligible	to be allowed to do or get something
Endorsement	coming out in favor of a candidate or issue
General election	the fall election where anyone can vote for any candidate
Nonpartisan	not tied to any political party or point of view
Partisan	has a point of view; may try to convince you how to vote
Political Party	a group that shares the same views about government and works together to win elections
Precinct	a local voting district that has its own polling place; every county has hundreds of precincts
Presidential	relating to the president
Primary election	the spring election in California on even years that helps parties choose their candidates for the fall general election
Register	to sign up; to get on an official list