

Chapter 5, Section 1

Issuing Ballots

RCW 29A.40, WAC 434-250, -235

In Washington State, we deliver a ballot packet to every active registered voter.

A voter may request their ballot be delivered to:

- The voter’s residence,
- A mailing address, or
- An address specific to the election (may be electronic).

The County Auditor must record the ballot issue date and report the total number of ballots issued by legislative and congressional district for every election.

Protecting Voter Secrecy

If a voting system prints **sequential** numbers on ballots, the County Auditor must put a procedure in place to prevent ballots from being issued to voters sequentially.

If necessary, change the sequential order of ballots by shuffling prior to inserting them into envelopes. See the [“Protecting Secrecy of the Vote”](#) Clearinghouse Notice.

Service and Overseas Voters (UOCAVA)

Send UOCAVA ballots 30 days before a special election and 45 days before a Primary or General Election.

Under UOCAVA, an overseas or service voter may request the delivery method of their ballot (postal mail, electronic). This preference applies to every election until the voter changes the information or the ballot is returned undeliverable.

If the voter does not indicate a preference, mail the ballot through the US Postal Service.

If a UOCAVA ballot sent electronically returns as undeliverable with no alternate delivery email address, a ballot must be sent by postal mail.

If an overseas or service voter submits a registration application that is missing a residential address and there isn’t enough time to contact the voter to obtain an address, place the voter in the precinct encompassing the County Auditor’s office for the current election.

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- If the ballot is returned, count only federal races and countywide offices/issues.
- If the voter's precinct is still undetermined following the primary or election, place the voter on inactive status and send confirmation notices to obtain the voter's correct Washington residential address.

Special Absentee

RCW 29A.40.050

Issue a special absentee ballot for a state Primary or General Election when:

- A voter submits a [Special Absentee Ballot Application](#) (example available on the OSOS website) or provides information indicating they will be unable to vote and return a regular ballot by normal mail delivery within the period provided for regular ballots, and
- The election is within 90 days.

If a regular ballot is not available, issue a paper ballot with blank lines for each office and issue and provide a list of known candidates and measures. The voter will write-in their choices on the blank lines.

- Do not wait to issue special absentee ballots; provide the voter with something as soon as you receive a complete request. If the voter did not indicate they are unable to vote and return a ballot by normal mail delivery on a special absentee form, you may contact the voter to verify they qualify for a special absentee.
- Include a list of known candidates and measures at the time of the application for that election.
- Instructions accompanying a special absentee ballot must state the voter may also cast a regular ballot that, if received, will count in lieu of the special absentee ballot.

The voter is entitled to request a regular ballot in addition to the special absentee ballot.

Inactive Voter Requests a Ballot

When an inactive voter requests a ballot, issue an **official** ballot (not a provisional) for the precinct listed on the current registration.

An inactive voter may submit a change of address that is received no later than 8 days prior to the day of the primary or election and receive a new ballot based on that new precinct. After 8 days and until 8:00 pm Election Day, inactive voters may update their voter registration in person at a county election office, vote center, or Auditor designated location, and receive a new ballot based on their new address.

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A voter who fails to update their residential address by the 8-day registration deadline and does not appear in-person at a county designated vote center to make the update may still vote according to their previous registration address. Too late address changes will be processed following the election.

Inactive voters shall be placed on active status when a request for a ballot or registration update is received.

Identification Required

WAC 434-250

When the County Auditor has not yet verified a voter's identification, issue the provisionally registered voter an **official** ballot.

The voter record shall be flagged in such a way that indicates a ballot shall not be processed until identification is provided. The return ballot envelope may also indicate that the voter is provisionally registered. Send an **Identification Notice** in compliance with WAC 434-250-045 at the time of the election or with the official ballot (this is not the Acknowledgment Notice).

The notice informs the voter:

- How to include a driver license number, state ID card number, tribal ID, the last four digits of a SSN number, or a photocopy of valid identification (include a list) with the voted ballot.
- How to return the required identification without compromising the security of the ballot.
- Notify voter, "If you fail to provide identification, your ballot will not be counted."
- Be sure to open any ballots received from provisionally registered voters to determine if the voter provided identification.

Replacement Ballot v. Reissued Ballot

When a ballot is requested and a ballot has not yet been accepted for that voter, you will need to determine if a replacement or reissued ballot is required:

- Replacement Ballot means a ballot that is the same type or style and precinct as the most recently issued ballot. The ballot contains the same races and measures.
 - Voters may request replacement ballots by telephone, in writing, electronically, or in person by the voter or a family member.
 - Issue replacement ballots to **both** active and inactive voters until 8:00 pm on Election Day.
 - Keep a record of each replacement ballot issued, including the date requested.

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- Reissued Ballot means a new ballot issued to a voter as a result of a residential address update and the voter’s ballot has changed — different precinct, different races, and/or different measures. This update can be a result of in-county address change or a registered voter transferring into a new county.
 - Voters may receive reissued ballots by submitting registration updates by telephone (if an in-county transfer), mail, online, electronic submission, or in-person no later than 8 days prior to Election Day. After the 8-day deadline, voters must appear in person at a county election office or vote center to update their address and receive a reissued ballot.

If you are unable to find a voter’s record, or if the voter indicates this is their first registration, register the voter and issue a ballot.

Address Confidentiality Program

Send official ballots to Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) participants as soon as possible no later than 18 days before the election. It takes longer for ACP ballots to reach the voters as the ballots are mailed to the Secretary of State’s ACP program. Repackaging the ballot and mailing to the voter can add 2-3 days. Mailing these ballots first class and putting all ballots for a household in an envelope or box can reduce the mailing time.

Mark the return envelope for delivery to authorized county personnel.

Ballot Packets

WAC 434-230, -235

Postal Mail Packets

For All Voters

- Ballot — specific to a voter’s precinct.
- Security envelope/sleeve.
- Pre-addressed, postage-paid return envelope with ballot declaration.
- Outer mailing envelope with required postal information. Provide postal endorsements that forwards ballots, send updated address information, and return undeliverable ballots to the County Auditor.
- Instructions — specific to the election, how to mark the ballot, and type of ballot.

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Overseas and Service (UOCAVA) Voters

Packets mailed to overseas and service voters have additional requirements.

Use return envelopes that use the **federal** prepaid return postage account when mailing through the US mailing services — do not use the business reply account for regular ballots.

Two additional items must be included:

1. A ballot privacy (secrecy) sheet; election information printed on this sheet must not verify nor identify the voter in any way.
2. A space for the voter to provide a telephone number.

UOCAVA voting instructions must specify:

- How to return the ballot by email, fax, or postal mail.
- How to use the ballot privacy sheet when returning a voted ballot electronically.
- The need to sign the ballot declaration on or before Election Day.
- How to obtain information about the election — e.g., county website and email addresses.
- How the voter confirms their ballot arrived at the elections office.
- County Auditor's complete contact information: website, mailing address, email address, phone number, and fax number.

Ballots – Delivered Electronically

Overseas and Service (UOCAVA) Voters

UOCAVA voters may choose to receive ballots via email or fax. All ballot packets must include:

- Information required for every mail ballot packet.
- A ballot declaration.
- Voting instructions specific to voting an email/fax ballot.
- A privacy sheet to separate the voted ballot from the signed declaration.
- County Auditor website information.
- Instructions for returning the ballot electronically by 8:00 pm PST Election Day, or by mail and postmarked on or before Election Day.

Non-UOCAVA Voters

While any voter may request to have their ballot delivered to them electronically, non-UOCAVA voters must return a paper ballot by mail, ballot drop box, or in person. No exceptions.

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Undeliverable Ballots

NVRA

An undeliverable ballot is one that the USPS could not deliver to the voter. The USPS may return mailed ballots to the election office as “undeliverable.”

You must request address change information from the USPS and use that information to update voter registration records. This information qualifies under the Federal National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) for changing the status of a voter.

If a ballot is returned as “undeliverable” or forwarded, the county auditor must process these ballots following certification of the election.

- If the updated address is within the county, transfer the voter registration and send the voter an acknowledgment notice, or
- If no updated address information was received or the updated address is outside the county, place the voter on inactive status and send the voter a confirmation notice to all known addresses.

i *Reconciliation Tip: Undeliverable ballots are not reported as “ballots returned” in election reports. They are just blank forms that did not reach voters as intended.*

Deadlines for Mailing Ballots

Days prior to an election	Type of ballot mailing	Requirements for requests received after deadline
90 days	Special absentee ballots	<i>Requests outside of 90 days — return application or hold until deadline</i> <i>Requests inside 90 days — issue immediately. Provide write-in ballots if official ballots are unavailable</i>
45 days	Primary and General Election ballots to overseas and military voters	Requests for overseas or military ballots inside 45 days — issue immediately

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30 days	Special election ballots to overseas and military voters	Requests for overseas or military ballots inside 30 days — issue immediately
18 days	Ballots for all elections are available and mailed to regular voters Ballots mailed to ACP voters AVUs available for use	Ballots requested inside 18 days — issue as soon as possible
8:00 P.M. Election Day	Ballots issued for requests received prior to 8:00 PM	Requests received after 8:00 PM will not be honored

Certificate of Mailing
RCW 29A.40, WAC 434-250

Before a primary or election, counties must certify ballot-mailing dates to the Secretary of State. The certification verifies your county mailed ballots no later than:

UOCAVA:

- The 30th day prior to special elections.
- The 45th day prior to Primary and General Elections.

All Other Ballots:

The day all other non-UOCAVA ballots are sent to the Post Office to be delivered, but no later than the 18th day prior to all primaries and elections.

Blank [certification forms](#) are available on the OSOS Administrators web page.

NOTES: _____

Chapter 5, Section 2

Receiving Ballots

RCW 29A.40, WAC 434-250, -235

You may receive voted ballots by mail, electronically (**overseas and service voters only**), or at a ballot drop box. From the time of receipt until opening, place all received return envelopes in secure storage.

For ballots deposited by voters at ballot drop boxes or voting centers, see requirements in the [“Voting Centers and Ballot Deposit Sites” Clearinghouse Notice](#).

Ballot Drop Boxes

Eighteen days before every election, the County Auditor must open a minimum of **two** ballot drop boxes in different geographical locations. However, each county must provide at least one ballot drop box in each city, town, and census-designated place with a post office as well as one ballot drop box for every 15,000 registered voters. These locations may be either a ballot drop box or a voting center.

State law prohibits electioneering, campaigning, or petitioning within 25 feet of any ballot drop box.

Procedures for managing ballot boxes are the same at drop boxes and voting centers:

- Secure boxes at all times with a lock and uniquely numbered seal. The seal, in conjunction with a seal log, documents access to the ballots. Seal logs must record when the box was opened and by whom.
- Deposited ballots must be accessible only to the County Auditor, assigned staff, or people appointed by the County Auditor.
- Transport ballots to the counting center. Two authorized people can do this together or one person can transport ballots in a container already secured with a seal and log.
- At exactly 8:00 pm, **empty or seal** all ballot drop boxes to prevent late ballot delivery on Election Day.

Allow voters in line at 8:00 pm to vote (or finish voting) and accept their ballots.

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- ① *Review ballot drop box seal logs immediately following Election Day. Are you missing a log or is the log incomplete? It is important to verify that the ballot drop box is empty.*

Unstaffed Ballot Drop Boxes

Availability

Unstaffed ballot drop boxes are available beginning 18 days prior to the election. The County Auditor may set specific hours of availability. Many unstaffed boxes are available 24 hours per day.

Secure an unstaffed ballot drop box located in a building with a lock, seal, and seal log.

Outdoor unstaffed drop boxes must be:

- Tamper-proof.
- Weatherproof.
- Anchored to prevent removal.
- Located in convenient, well-lit areas.
- Accessible.

Operations

Empty the drop boxes:

- Frequently enough to prevent damage to ballots.
- Frequently enough to prevent the box from becoming too full.
- Frequently enough to prevent unauthorized access.
- With no fewer than two staff members or appointees.

Staffed Ballot Drop Boxes

Availability

The County Auditor establishes the dates and times that staffed ballot drop boxes are available to voters. Staffed ballot drop boxes must be open on Election Day and remain open until 8:00 pm.

Operations

At least two people must staff the box and subscribe to an oath regarding the discharge of duties. They must be:

- Employees of the County Auditor's office, or
- Representatives of different major political parties appointed by the County Auditor.

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Staff must record the seal number of the box prior to the first deposit. The seal must be intact when returned to the Auditor.

Ballots returned after 8:00 pm Election Day **must** be sent to the Canvassing Board for rejection. Deliver the sealed, unopened ballot box/container to the County Auditor upon closing.

Student Engagement Hubs

[RCW 29A.40.180](#)

ESB 6313 requires several counties to provide Student Engagement Hubs on college campuses. Each state university, regional university, and The Evergreen State College, as defined in RCW 28B.10.016 must provide both voter registration services and ballots via the Public Voter Portal (VoteWA) to Washington citizens. Higher education campuses as defined in RCW 28B.45.012 (branch campuses) only need to provide ballots via the Public Voter Portal.

Student Hubs may be open during county business hours starting up to eight days before an election through 8:00 pm on Election Day or until all voters in line at 8:00 pm have voted and deposited their ballots. Hubs are only required to be open during November General Elections.

A list of all Student Engagement Hubs must appear in the printed State Voters’ Pamphlet and the printed Local Voters’ Pamphlet produced by the applicable counties. Institutions must contract with the county for Student Engagement Hub operation.

For further information, refer to the [“ESB 6313 Advisory #2 — Student Engagement Hubs” advisory](#).

Voting Center Requirements

[RCW 29A.40.160](#), [WAC 434-250-105](#)

Availability

At least one voting center, typically the County Auditor’s Office, must be open during regular business hours during the entire voting period, starting 18 days prior to the election and ending at 8:00 pm Election Day. In addition to the location requirements outlined in [RCW 29A.40.160\(2\)](#), the County Auditor may determine the days and hours of any additional voting centers.

Operations

Requirements for staffed ballot drop boxes also apply to voting centers.

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Additionally, voting centers must:

- Be in an accessible location (ADA).
- Be located in a public building or building leased by a public entity including, but not limited to, libraries.
- Be marked with signage outside the building indicating it is a place for voting.
- Issue ballots, including all appropriate ballot packet materials (ballot declarations), for all Washington voters both in and out-of-county.
- Offer disability access voting, ensuring voter privacy.
- Provide provisional ballots.
- Require identification or a signed ballot declaration prior to voting on a DRE.
- Voters' pamphlets — state and local when applicable.
- Provide real-time voter registration services via VoteWA for all Washington voters both in and out-of-county (Universal Registration). Offer conditional registration and balloting services if the system is unable to process applications.
- Display voter information required by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), including election-specific information and an example of an actual ballot or a sample ballot in substantially the same format as an actual ballot.
- Display appropriate partisan office notice.
- Provide instructions on how to mark the ballot properly.
- Provide election materials in alternative languages, if required.
- Assist voters.
- Provide a ballot drop box.
- Secure the ballot drop box at exactly 8:00 pm on Election Day, or after all voters in line have cast a ballot.

i *For more information regarding voter registration and issuing ballots for out-of-county voters, refer to the "ESB 6313 Advisory #1 — Universal Registration" advisory.*

Electronic Voting on a DRE

A direct recording electronic voting device (DRE) records votes electronically on a device. A printout shows the voter how the votes were recorded, but the device does not produce a paper ballot. The votes are uploaded from the device into the tabulation system.

Prior to voting on a DRE:

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- Staff must verify in real-time that the voter does not already have an accepted ballot for the current election by accessing VoteWA. Voting centers not located at the County Auditor’s Office must have access to VoteWA.
- All voters who vote on a DRE must sign the ballot declaration.
- At the time the voter signs a ballot declaration, issue the ballot in VoteWA.
- To vote, the voter must provide valid photo identification, or the county may compare the signature on the ballot declaration to the voter registration record.
- Immediately after casting a ballot on a DRE, prevent double voting by crediting or flagging the voter’s registration as having already voted in the election in VoteWA by changing the status of the voter’s ballot to “accepted.”

You may either verify the voter’s signature on the declaration to the voter registration signature OR require the voter to provide photo identification prior to casting the ballot. If the voter does not have identification and the signature does not match, offer the voter a provisional ballot. Valid photo identification for voting on a DRE includes a driver’s license, state ID card, student ID card, tribal ID card, and an employer ID card.

i *A voter registration card is not photo identification.*

How to Vote on an AVU that is not a DRE

Accessible voting units (AVU) allow a voter to mark and print a paper ballot. The voter places the ballot into a security envelope and a signed ballot return envelope. Some systems require the voter to bring the ballot they received in the mail while others print the ballot on blank paper.

- Voters do not need to provide identification, nor do they sign a declaration other than the one on the envelope.
- If the system requires the voter to bring their ballot with them, the voter simply uses the device to mark the ballot.
- If the system prints the ballot, election staff must consult VoteWA for the correct ballot style and load the ballot into the system for the voter.
- For either system, marked ballots are placed in a security envelope and a signed ballot return envelope, then deposited in the ballot drop box.
- The ballot is processed the same as ballots returned through the mail or ballot drop box.

Provisional Ballots

When to issue a provisional ballot?

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- The voter's record shows an accepted ballot, but the voter asserts they have not yet voted and requests a new ballot.
- A voter is registered in another state.

A provisional ballot packet includes:

- A ballot that cannot be read by the tabulation system.
- A secrecy envelope.
- A provisional ballot outer envelope.
- Written notice about the free access system.

The voter must:

- Sign the declaration.
- Provide addresses (registered address, both present and former if applicable).
- Include date of birth.
- Insert the ballot inside the secrecy and outer envelopes and return to the elections staff.

Elections staff will verify that all required information is on the outer envelope of the provisional ballot.

Free Access System

At the time of voting, provide the provisional ballot voter with written information on how to ascertain the status of their provisional ballot without cost to the voter. Access to this information must be restricted to the voter and not open to view by others.

Through a free access system or voter notification, every provisional voter must be able to learn if their provisional ballot was counted.

Requirements:

- Instructions on how to determine if their ballot was counted must be given to the voter at time of casting a provisional ballot.
- Information must be available to the voter one week after certification.
- Must be free to voter.
- Must be exclusively available to voter.
- Information on the system or voter notification should show the disposition of the ballot was determined as valid and counted, not counted, or an explanation of why it was rejected, or sent to another county for determination.

See [52 USC 21082](#), [RCW 29A.60.195](#), and [WAC 434-261-125](#).

NOTES:

Chapter 5, Section 3

Initial Processing

RCW 29A.40, .60, WAC 434-250, -261

The three phases of ballot processing: **initial**, **final**, and **tabulation**.

Initial processing refers to all steps taken to prepare ballots for tabulation. When a voter moves from one precinct to another, or if the voter’s ballot style changes, the first valid ballot that matches the voter’s current ballot is the ballot to count.

Initial processing begins upon receipt of the ballot, including:

- Postmark verification.
- Signature verification.
- Crediting voters.
- Opening and separating envelopes.
- Manual inspection of ballots.
- Scanning (if applicable).
- Duplication, resolution, or adjudication.
- Any additional steps required to prepare the ballots for tabulation.

Postmark Verification

A valid mailed ballot requires a postmark date of Election Day or before. Ballots deposited in a ballot drop box do not have postmarks, but ballot drop boxes are closed at 8:00 pm Election Day. The fluorescent barcode printed on the ballot envelope and a date of mailing through a commercial mailing service (i.e. FedEx, UPS) qualifies as a postmark. Refer any ballot envelope postmarked after Election Day or deposited later than 8:00 pm to the County Canvassing Board.

Exceptions to the postmark requirement for mailed ballots:

- Instead of a postmark, UOCAVA ballots require a signature date on or before Election Day.
- When the postmark is illegible or missing on non-UOCAVA ballots, use the date the voter signed the declaration.
- Postage that prints a date (metered or printed stickers) does not qualify as a postmark — use the date the voter signed the declaration.

Signature Verification

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Every valid ballot requires a signed declaration. Staff verifies that the signature accompanying the ballot matches the signature on the voter's registration record. (Voters have the option of providing photo identification prior to using a DRE.)

Before verifying signatures, staff must:

- Attend signature verification training.
- Sign an oath.

Every county should have written procedures for accepting or challenging ballots based on signature verification.

Signature Issues

What if the voter is unable to sign?

If a voter is unable to sign the declaration, they may make a mark witnessed by two people. The return ballot envelope must have spaces for the signatures of the witnesses. Do not verify signatures of witnesses.

What if the voter uses a common nickname?

Accept common nicknames or initials as long as the handwriting and the last name are the same.

What if the voter signs a different name?

As long as the handwriting is CLEARLY the same:

- The last name may differ provided the first name has not changed.
- The first name may differ as long as the last name is the same.

What if the voter uses a power of attorney (POA)?

POA does not apply to voting. Do not accept signatures using the voter's POA and treat the ballot envelope as unsigned.

What if the voter returns a ballot that was not issued to the voter who signed?

Count the ballot for the registered voter who actually signed the ballot declaration when:

- The voter who signed the declaration can be identified.
- The signature on the declaration matches the signature on the voter registration record.
- The voter who signed the declaration has not returned another ballot.

i *Check the precinct! You must count only the races and measures the voter is eligible to vote.*

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Cure an Unsigned Declaration (Missing Signature)

When a returned ballot lacks a mark or signature to the declaration, the voter may “cure” the unsigned declaration.

If a signature is missing, immediately notify the voter by first class mail of the steps the voter must take:

- Appear in person and sign the declaration no later than the day before certification; or
- Sign a copy of the declaration or mark in front of two witnesses and return it to the County Auditor no later than the day before certification.

See Missing Signature Form. Accept forms returned by email/fax, mail, or in person.

Do not send a copy of the voter’s signature with the form. A voter’s signature is not public information and cannot be released.

If the voter has not responded by three days before certification, **telephone** the voter. Keep a record of the following items:

- The date of phone contact and the notice sent.
- The date the voter submitted the cure notice.

Note: A current ballot signature issue cannot be “cured” by a signature on a suspended ballot.

CURING UNSIGNED DECLARATIONS:		
Actions available to voter	Deadline	Count the ballot when...
Appear in person to sign declaration	The day before certification	Signature on declaration matches the signature on voter registration record
Sign a copy of the declaration and return it to the County Auditor’s Office	The day before certification	Signature on copy of declaration matches signature on voter registration record

Cure a Signature that Does Not Match

Voters must cure questioned or mismatched signatures by the day prior to certification of the election or primary.

CURING NO MATCH/MISMATCH SIGNATURES			
Actions available to voter	Deadline	Count the ballot when...	Signature valid for

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Sign a new registration form or signature update form (includes both ballot declaration and voter registration oath)	The day before certification	Signature on new registration or update form matches signature on ballot declaration	Current and future elections Registration will be updated with the new signature
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If a voter signs and returns the ballot of another voter, the ballot may be counted for the **signer** if they can be identified.

- The signature on the envelope must match the signer’s voter registration record.
- The voter who signed must not have returned another ballot.
- Only issues that the voter is qualified to vote upon will count.

i *A voter may not cure a signature after certification of the election just to qualify for recount.*

Special Circumstance Ballots

Replacement Ballots

Both active and inactive voters may receive replacement ballots. If the voter returns two ballots of the same type/style and precinct, process the first valid ballot received for their current registration.

If the voter returns additional replacement ballots, they shall be assigned suspended/canceled status and considered informational or invalid.

i *Reconciliation Tip: “Informational/invalid ballots” should not be sent to the Canvassing Board for rejection nor be included in your reconciliation report.*

Reissued Ballots

If the voter moved from one precinct to another, or if the voter’s ballot style changed to include or exclude contests, this is a reissued ballot. If the voter returns more than one reissued ballot, the current ballot (the ballot that matches the voter’s current residential information) should be counted. All other ballots received from that voter are considered informational, and are not rejected.

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Federal Write-in Absentee Ballots (FWAB)

FWABs are intended for military or overseas voters who did not receive a regular ballot. Any military or overseas elector may use a FWAB for any election.

UOCAVA voters may also be registered from a voted ballot when a signed declaration accompanies the ballot.

Prior to processing a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB), refer to the [“Service and Overseas Voters” Clearinghouse](#).

The Clearinghouse answers the following questions:

- Who qualifies as a service voter?
- What should I do if the voter is not registered?
- What should I do if the voter also returns an official ballot?
- What should I do if a military or overseas voter does not provide a Washington State residential address?

UOCAVA Ballots Submitted Electronically

Accept voted UOCAVA ballots returned by electronic transmission no later than 8:00 pm PST Election Day.

Only UOCAVA voters may return a ballot electronically.

- A copy of the signed declaration must be included.
- The original ballot is not required.
- Process the ballot (duplicate if necessary) if the signature on the declaration matches the voter registration record.

Secrecy of the eBallot:

- Print the ballot and attachments.
- Separate the declaration from the voted ballot by a privacy sheet or envelope.
- Apply public disclosure exemptions.

Not an official ballot?

The state of Washington allows voting responses on something other than the official ballot.

- Confirm the voter did not already return a ballot.

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- The voter must still sign a ballot declaration and it must accompany the voting responses. If a signed declaration is not included, treat it as an unsigned ballot.
- Count only the votes for offices and measures for which the voter is eligible.

i *Exception: responses on ballots from prior elections do not count.*

Duplicate the valid votes onto the correct precinct ballot.

Provisional Ballots

When you receive a provisional ballot, first check VoteWA to see if the voter is registered anywhere in WA.

If registered in another county:

- Send the ballot to that county.

If registered in your county:

- If the correct ballot was voted and there is not already an accepted ballot for this voter — process the provisional ballot.
- If the incorrect ballot was voted — process and duplicate the ballot to the correct ballot style with the offices and issues for which the voter was eligible.

If not registered to vote in Washington:

- If the voter was canceled in error - reinstate registration and process.
- If the voter was canceled correctly or was not registered anywhere in WA before the 8PM Election deadline - ballot does not count.
- If the voter is registered in another state - treat the ballot as if the voter is not registered; do not send ballot to the other state.

Crediting Voters

Credit all voters with valid ballots before certifying the election or primary. Crediting voters for voting usually occurs automatically when logging receipt of valid ballots into VoteWA.

Do not credit voters with rejected ballots.

Opening and Separating Envelopes

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In order to protect the secrecy of ballots, use a two-step process:

1. Separate the security envelopes/sleeves from the outer declaration envelopes.
2. Isolate the declaration envelopes prior to removing ballots from the security envelopes/sleeves.

Store the declaration envelopes in a logical manner — you may need to find them later.

Confirm ballots do not remain in the envelopes by doing one of the following:

- Look through the envelope hole, or
- Insert an object through the hole, such as a zip tie.

i *Be prepared: Envelopes do not always contain the correct ballot or any ballot at all! Anticipate problems when writing office procedures.*

Manual Inspection

Ensure correct tabulation by manually inspecting ballots for voter intent issues. All ballots must be manually inspected prior to scanning or tabulation.

Inspect all ballots manually:

1. Both sides of the ballot.
2. Each response position.

Training for ballot inspectors should include:

- An explanation of what the county tabulation system will and will not read.
- A copy of and thorough explanation of the *Statewide Standards on What is a Vote (WAC 434-261-086)*.
- Any special rules that apply to the specific primary or election (e.g., Presidential Primary).
- Office procedures for write-in votes.

When manually inspecting ballots, look for anything that prevents correct tabulation of the ballot or any reason the ballot may need to be duplicated.

Duplicating and Resolving

Duplication is the process of creating a true, readable (by the tabulation system) copy of valid votes onto an official blank ballot, paper or electronic.

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A **readable** ballot is any ballot that the county vote tabulation system can accept and read as the voter intended. When a ballot is unreadable by the tabulation system, you must duplicate the votes to a blank ballot.

i *Include ballot duplication situations and procedures in the County Canvassing Board manual.*

Resolving ballots is the process of telling a digital scan voting system how to interpret how a voter marked their ballot, known as “adjudication” in some counties.

Whether a county is duplicating or resolving, there are specific requirements that apply:

- Teams of at least two staff members.
- An audit of all duplicated ballots, both paper and electronic, by another team of two staff members.
- A unique control number must be assigned to the original ballot and corresponding copy.
- For ballot duplication, the duplication log must include the total number of ballots duplicated and the initials of the duplication team members.
- For ballot resolution/adjudication, a log from the system is printed and signed by the two staff members who resolved/adjudicated the ballots.

When using an automated duplication program, you must compare the duplicate ballot to the original eBallot to ensure the votes match the original ballot.

Overseas and Service (UOCAVA) Ballots

Duplication of FWABs and Electronically Received Ballots

These ballots are not typically ready to scan and tabulate. Sometimes the user is unable to print the whole ballot or you’ll receive a copy that’s difficult to read.

In all cases, do your best to honor the voter's intent.

FWABs (Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots)

Some UOCAVA voters will vote on a generic federal write-in ballot that doesn’t provide candidate names or measures. These voters may not know the exact name of a candidate and will simply write in the position and name of a political party. The FWAB allows them to indicate a party preference that applies to all the positions on the ballot. When this happens, count votes according to voter intent Rule R.

If you are unable to determine the voter precinct, duplicate the ballot as if the voter resides at the County Auditor’s Office. In this case, only the votes for countywide issues and congressional district in which the County Auditor’s Office is located can be counted.

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Voter Registration Challenges – Ballots
RCW 29A.08

If a voter challenges another voter’s registration record **before** a voted ballot is received by the County Auditor’s Office, the ballot must be set aside with a record of pertinent information, and then presented to the Canvassing Board for determination.

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Chapter 5, Section 4

Final Processing

RCW 29A.60, WAC 434-250, -261

Final processing begins with ballot scanning and ends before votes are tabulated by the tabulation system. The type of tabulation equipment used determines when ballot scanning may begin:

- **Systems that scan ballot images and store the images outside the tabulation program (digital)** may begin scanning as ballots are returned.
- **Systems that simultaneously scan the ballot image and tabulate the results (optical)** may begin ballot scanning at 7:00 am on Election Day. If the county has a pre-approved security procedure, they may begin after 7:00 am the day before Election Day.

ⓘ At no time should observers handle ballots. Only authorized staff may handle ballots.

Tabulation

Tabulation is the production of election results in a format that can be read by a person, whether precinct totals, partial cumulative totals, or final cumulative totals.

Tabulation, regardless of the type of vote tallying system, may not begin before 8:00 pm on Election Day.

ⓘ Prior to every election, confirm that all computer and support systems are accurately displaying the correct times and dates.

Duplication and Resolution/Adjudication

During final processing, ballots may need duplicating or resolving/adjudication if:

- The tabulator damages the ballot.
- Manual inspection did not detect final processing issues.

Whether discovering a ballot reading issue during initial or final processing, apply the duplication or resolution/adjudication procedures consistently.

At all times, seal original and duplicate ballots in secure storage, except during duplication, tabulation, or inspection by the County Canvassing Board.

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Write-in Votes

To promote consistency statewide, we have rules pertaining to write-in votes. To help you manage the complex aspects of write-in voting, refer to the [“Write-in Voting” Clearinghouse](#).

- Election results must include the total number of write-in votes for each office.
- Manage ballots with write-in votes, overvotes, and undervotes during tabulation so you can easily revisit these ballots.
- Write-in votes cast for a candidate whose name does not appear on the ballot are not individually tallied unless the candidate has filed a timely write-in candidate declaration.

Valid Write-in Votes

A write-in candidate must file a declaration of candidacy before Election Day in order to tally votes for that candidate.

In order to advance from the Primary to the General Election ballot, a write-in candidate needs to meet both of these qualifications:

- Receive at least 1% of the total votes cast for that office. Total votes cast includes votes for candidates printed on the ballot plus the total write-in votes. Overvotes and undervotes are not valid votes cast for candidates and are not used in determining whether a candidate meets the 1% requirement.
- Be one of the top two vote-getters.

In a General Election race, a write-in candidate must receive the most votes to be elected.

- Tally votes for declared individual candidates only when it could make a difference in the outcome of the election.
- Do not tally or duplicate individual votes for write-in candidates who did not file a timely declaration of candidacy.

Frequently Asked Questions about Write-in Voting

What are write-in votes?

Each office has a line where the voter may write in any name as their choice for that office.

Who is a declared write-in candidate?

A write-in candidate who submits a declaration of candidacy form and pays the appropriate filing fee (if applicable) no later than 8:00 pm on Election Day.

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Can anyone be a declared write-in candidate?

Declared write-in candidates must possess the same qualifications as regular candidates. Candidates who lost the Primary are ineligible as a declared candidate for the same race in the General. Candidates already appearing on the ballot for another office are also ineligible.

Are votes for fictitious characters valid?

The voter cast them as valid write-in votes, so the votes are included in the total number of write-ins. However, since fictitious characters cannot submit a declaration of candidacy, votes cast for them will not be tallied.

Is the vote valid if the voter did not fill in the response position on the ballot?

Yes. If the voter writes a declared write-in candidate on the write-in line, it is a valid vote, even without a marked response position. Consider this when manually inspecting ballots. If tabulated, write-in votes without a marked response area will record as undervoted (Refer to the question, "Should a ballot with a write-in vote be duplicated if the response position is not marked?").

If the voter votes for a candidate printed on the ballot and writes in a vote for the same office, is it an overvote?

Yes, *unless* the voter voted for a printed candidate and wrote the same candidate's name as a write-in. In that case, the vote is valid for that candidate.

When do you tally write-in votes?

Report the total number of write-in votes cast for each office. Then, tally the votes for individual declared write-in candidates only if those votes could make a difference in the outcome of the election.

Check the results of each race with a declared write-in candidate to determine if you must tally for individual write-in candidates.

A declared write-in candidate needs to receive the next highest number of votes in a Primary AND at least 1% of the total votes cast in order to appear on the General Election ballot.

Should I duplicate a ballot with a write-in vote if the response position is not marked?

It is not required to duplicate ballots with write-ins. State law only requires that individual votes be tallied when the sum of write-ins, overvotes, and undervotes are enough to affect the outcome of the election.

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Exception: The number of votes cast for Governor, including write-in votes, determines the number of signatures required for state initiatives and referenda. This total refers to all votes cast for Governor, including write-in votes. In this case report all write-in votes, including those not filling in a response position, to the Secretary of State. For Governor, ballots must also be duplicated when the write-in response position is marked, but no candidate is written in. This is not a valid write-in vote.

For digital scan tabulation systems, should I enter the write-in vote into my system when resolving ballots?

You are not required to record the candidate's name. If you are required to tally these votes later, however, you will need to pull the ballots to tally the votes. To avoid this situation, some digital scan counties record the individual names of declared write-in candidates during the process of resolving.

Are write-in vote totals included in the official results of the election?

Yes, usually as a total for the write-in category. A write-in vote is a valid, recordable vote.

Should declared write-in candidates be included in the voters' pamphlet?

Not for the election or primary for which they have declared. If the candidate declared as a write-in for the Primary and qualified for the General, then the candidate is no longer a write-in and will be printed on the ballot and included in the General Election Voters' Pamphlet.

Post-Election

Ballot counting continues after Election Day through to the final day of canvassing because you may receive valid ballots any time during that period.

Valid ballots are defined as:

- Ballots with a valid postmark received between Election Day until the end of the day prior to certification.
- Ballots from UOCAVA voters signed no later than the day of the election and received by end of the day prior to certification.
- Valid provisional ballots, including those from other counties.
- Ballots canvassed and determined to be valid by the County Canvassing Board.
- Ballots duplicated after Election Day.

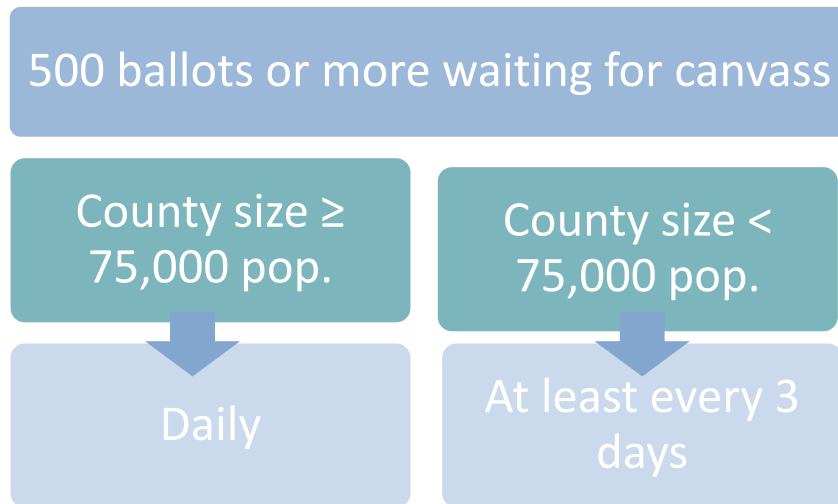
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When to Tabulate After Election Day

The number of ballots, the length of time, and the population of the county determines when to tabulate following Election Day.

RCW 29A.60.160 mandates, "...the county auditor, as delegated by the County Canvassing Board, shall process ballots and canvass the votes cast at that primary or election on a daily basis in counties with a population of seventy-five thousand or more, or at least every third day for counties with a population of less than seventy-five thousand, if the county auditor is in possession of more than five hundred ballots that have yet to be canvassed."

i *Important — Update results In VoteWA immediately following every count and send a pdf of the results and your tabulator file to the OSOS.*



Results

Report election and primary results as:

- Cumulative
- By precinct

After every tabulation session is completed, results are:

- Uploaded to the VoteWA system before you leave for the day.
- Showing on your public website.
- A pdf copy of the results file is transmitted to Office of the Secretary of State.

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- Printed out for the record.
- Transmitted by email/fax to media and other interested parties.

Check it out!

Within two days after Election Day, review results for anomalies by comparing precinct-by-precinct results for each race, measure and jurisdiction. Look for any anomalies such as:

- Abnormal number of overvotes
- Abnormal number of undervotes
- Odd vote distribution (especially within a jurisdiction)
- Unlikely patterns of voter turnout

Investigate and document the cause of any anomaly. Correct any identified errors.



Post-Election Audits RCW 29A.60.170, .185

Duplicated Ballot Audit

A separate team of two must audit ballots duplicated during final processing. This audit compares the duplicated ballot to the original ballot.

Random Check of Counting Equipment – Random Precinct/Batch Audit

A random check of the ballot tabulation equipment is required and **must be completed no later than 48 hours after Election Day.**

The random check compares the manual count of the ballots to the machine count on the tabulation system. The random check/batch audit must:

- Include three precincts or six batches depending on ballot counting procedures in the county.
- Be limited to one office or issue on the ballots selected for the check.
- Include procedures adopted by the county Canvassing Board prior to processing ballots.
 - Procedures must specify under what circumstances a discrepancy will lead to an audit of additional ballots and the method to determine how many additional ballots will be selected.

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- Procedures must establish how the random precinct/batches to be checked shall be selected.

Final Storage

Secure all ballots immediately after tabulation. You may separate ballots according to precinct or batch.

If a single container stores multiple precincts or batches:

- Clearly separate the precincts or batches (e.g., with a piece of colored paper).
- Note which precincts or batches are in the box on the outside label.

Only open the storage containers when directed by the Canvassing Board or court order.

i *In a close race, it may be necessary to re-examine ballots with undervotes, overvotes and write-in votes. Consider this when storing ballots.*

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