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# 2024 Petition Process

# Observer Training

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# **Overview**

The power to directly enact or amend state law through an Initiative or Referendum is an important constitutional right in Washington State. The Office of the Secretary of State plays a vital role in facilitating this important right.

The Secretary of State is responsible for verifying the validity of signatures submitted on State Initiative and Referendum petitions. Only petitions with at least the minimum required number of valid signatures will be certified for placement on the ballot or move on to the Legislature for a vote.

Individuals from the campaigns for or against an Initiative or Referenda measure are welcome to observe the Secretary of State petition process. Such individuals are called “Observers”. Observer participation helps bring transparency to the process and helps ensure the verification of a petition is conducted according to established rules and procedures.

The responsibility for validating petition signatures rests with the Secretary of State’s Elections Division. Observers are not authorized to participate in the decisions made during the Secretary of State’s petition checking process. All decisions regarding the acceptance or rejection of a signature will be made by the Secretary of State’s staff.

To ensure that the Secretary of State’s responsibilities are carried out in an orderly manner, observers must adhere to the Secretary of State’s Observer Standards. A copy of these standards is included in this Observer training packet.

Additionally, the Elections Division hopes these standards help clarify the observer’s role in the petition checking process. The Secretary of State’s Office appreciates the cooperation of all observers.

**Petition Checking Process**

**Step 1—Petition Sheet Inspection & Page Count**

If the sponsor of an Initiative or Referenda can collect at least the minimum required signatures before the end of the filing period, they would then submit their signature petition sheets to the Secretary of State’s office for sheet inspection and signature review. The OSOS staff would then inspect every petition sheet submitted for the required form and language, repair any damage to the sheets and count how many petition sheets were delivered by the sponsor of the Initiative or Referenda. After the sheets have been counted, inspected and any damage repaired, the petition sheets are scanned and entered into our petition processing system.

*The OSOS petition checkers receive signature verification training conducted by the Washington State Patrol Forensics (WSP) office. In addition to the WSP techniques, checkers follow the signature verification standards set forth in WAC’s 434-379-009, 434-379-012 and 434-379-020.*

**Step 2—Petition Signature Line Count**

When the scanned images of the petition sheets are loaded into our petition processing system, the OSOS petition checking staff identify the blank lines and blacked-out lines from the petition sheets and remove them from the count of valid signature lines. Each petition sheet image is inspected to verify the system correctly identified lines with signatures, going through 2 rounds of review. The total number of valid signature lines is then determined. If the total number of valid signature lines is above the minimum required (*324,516 for Initiatives & 162,258 for Referenda*), a program will be run to randomly select 3% of the valid signature lines to be signature verified.

**Step 3—Check the Signatures - 1st Review**

The randomly identified signatures in the 3% sample are compared to the voter’s registration signature on record. A signature may be rejected for four different reasons:

* The signer of the petition is not found in the voter registration database. This may mean the signer is not a registered voter. The signer may also not be found in the database if they had moved or changed their name and they failed to update their voter registration record. Another reason a signer may not be found in the voter registration record is if the handwriting on the petition sheet is illegible so we cannot make out enough information to search for the signer in the voter registration record. These signatures are rejected and sent for 2nd review.
* The signature on the petition sheet does not match the signer’s signature we have on record for them in the Voter Registration Database. These signatures are rejected and sent for 2nd review.
* Duplicate signature. A registered voter may sign an Initiative or Referendum petition only once. Once a signature was accepted for a voter, the system does not allow acceptance of a second signature from that voter. The second signature is categorized as a duplicate signature and rejected.
* Signature Missing. On rare occasion, a voter’s signature may be missing from the Voter Registration Record Database. In this case, the signatures are considered pending. If needed, the Secretary of State’s office will contact the County Auditor for the voter’s signature to complete the signature verification process for that signature line.

**Step 4—Check the Signatures – 2nd Review**

A second review of rejected signatures is completed by a permanent staff member of the Secretary of State’s office to verify signatures not found and signatures that do not match what is on record before a final decision is made about the acceptance or rejection of each of the rejected signatures.

If after 1st and 2nd review of the 3% sample of the signature lines, there are not enough valid signatures to meet the minimum requirements to certify the petition after the random check, the Secretary of State’s office will do a full check of all the valid signature lines. Every signature is verified in a full check before the Secretary of State can reject a petition. A petition may be certified on a 3% check but can only be rejected after a full check of all the signature lines shows that there are not enough valid signatures to meet the minimum requirements for certification.

## **Step 5—Certification**

If an Initiative or Referendum petition passes the 3% random check (or full check as necessary), the Initiative or Referenda measure is certified to appear on the ballot (Initiative to the People or Referenda) or sent to the Legislature for a vote (Initiative to the Legislature).

# **Information for Observers**

All prospective observers must first attend Observer training provided by the Secretary of States Office before they can participate in observing the petition checking process. The Initiative or Referenda sponsor and opposition groups can appoint as many observers as they would like, but each group must appoint a “Head Observer” for the sponsor’s and opposition observer groups. The “Head Observer” for each group will be responsible for scheduling their groups’ observers and relaying information about the petitions process from OSOS to their group’s observers.

It is critically important for the smooth operation of the petitions process that observers follow the Secretary of State’s staff’s direction and stay within designated observation zones. Tape will mark the floor indicating the petition processing areas off limits to observers.

Any questions by observers should be directed to the OSOS floor manager or supervisor on duty. The Office of the Secretary of State will review and consider issues presented by observers and will notify both sides of any response.

**The Secretary of State’s staff will:**

* Provide Observer training for official observers.
* Treat Observers with respect and courtesy.
* Train each petition checker on the signature verification standard as set forth in state rule.
* Determine the total number of observers allowed within the checking area with both sides allowed equal representation. The Secretary of State’s Office will not recognize more than one “Head Observer” from each group to represent the sponsor and opposition organization for the purposes of appointing and scheduling observers.
* Notify the sponsor and opposition groups of the dates and times of the petition process.
* Notify all parties of any modifications to the petition process or timelines.
* Discuss any observer issues with the “Lead Observer” for each group.
* Request an observer leave the premises if an observer is:
	+ Compromising the integrity or efficiency of the petition check by their actions.
	+ Not following the Secretary of State’s Observer Standards.

## **Sponsor and Opposition Organizations will:**

* Provide observers who will:
	+ Attend the Secretary of State Observer Training.
	+ Adhere to the Observer Standards set by the Secretary of State.
* The sponsor and opposition group will each appoint a “Head Observer” to represent their observer group during the petition process.

**Observers Standards**

## **Observers Will:**

* Attend Observer Training.
* Treat Secretary of State Staff and other observers with respect and courtesy.
* Sign in with the OSOS Floor Manager each day before observing.
* Wear a Visitor badge, provided by the OSOS Floor Manager, while observing.
* Direct questions to the OSOS Floor Manager.
* Minimize physical disruption of the petition processing process.
* Behave in a manner that is not distracting to the petition checkers.
* Leave the petitions area and building when not actively observing.
* Leave the building when asked if not following Observer Standards set by the Secretary of State’s office.

## **Observers May Not:**

* Ask questions of the individual petition checkers nor ask a petition checker to slow down, speed up, or otherwise alter their work.
* Make a record of the names, addresses, or other information on the petitions or related records.
* Handle petition sheets, scanners, or the OSOS computers.
* Bring digital recorders, cameras, laptops or any other prohibited communication or recording device into the petition check area, and cell phones must be turned off.

**If these rules are not followed, the observer will be asked to leave and lose the right to be an observer.**

**RCW’s & WAC’s Relating to the Petitions Process**

### **RCW**[**29A.72.100**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.100) **- Petitions—Paper—Size—Contents**

The person proposing the measure (the sponsor) shall print blank petitions upon single sheets of paper of good writing quality (including but not limited to newsprint) not less than eleven inches in width and not less than fourteen inches in length. Each petition at the time of circulating, signing, and filing with the secretary of state must consist of not more than one sheet with numbered lines for not more than twenty signatures, with the prescribed warning and title, be in the form required by **RCW** [**29A.72.110**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.110), [**29A.72.120**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.120), or [**29A.72.130**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.130), and have a readable, full, true, and correct copy of the proposed measure printed on the reverse side of the petition.

### **RCW**[**29A.72.110**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.110) **- Petitions to Legislature—Form**

Petitions for proposing measures for submission to the legislature at its next regular session must be substantially in the following form:

*“The warning prescribed by RCW*[***29A.72.140***](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.140)*; Warning statement—Further requirements.”*

The word "warning" and the following warning statement regarding signing petitions must appear on petitions as prescribed by this title and must be printed on each petition sheet such that they occupy not less than four square inches of the front of the petition sheet:

*WARNING*

*“Every person who signs this petition with any other than his or her true name, knowingly signs more than one of these petitions, signs this petition when he or she is not a legal voter, or makes any false statement on this petition may be punished by fine or imprisonment or both.”*

Followed by:

*INITIATIVE PETITION FOR SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATURE*

 *To the Honorable . . . . . ., Secretary of State of the State of Washington:*

*We, the undersigned citizens and legal voters of the State of Washington, respectfully direct that this petition and the proposed measure known as Initiative Measure No. XXXX and entitled (here set forth the established ballot title of the measure), a full, true, and correct copy of which is printed on the reverse side of this petition, be transmitted to the legislature of the State of Washington at its next ensuing regular session, and we respectfully petition the legislature to enact said proposed measure into law; and each of us for himself or herself says: I have personally signed this petition; I am a legal voter of the State of Washington in the city (or town) and county written after my name, my residence address is correctly stated, and I have knowingly signed this petition only once.*

The following declaration must be printed on the reverse side of the petition:

*I, . . . . . . . . . . . ., swear or affirm under penalty of law that I circulated this sheet of the foregoing petition, and that, to the best of my knowledge, every person who signed this sheet of the foregoing petition knowingly and without any compensation or promise of compensation willingly signed his or her true name and that the information provided therewith is true and correct. I further acknowledge that under chapter*[***29A.84***](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.84)*RCW, forgery of signatures on this petition constitutes a class C felony, and that offering any consideration or gratuity to any person to induce them to sign a petition is a gross misdemeanor, such violations being punishable by fine or imprisonment or both.*

### **RCW**[**29A.72.150**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.150) **- Petitions—Signatures—Number Necessary**

When the person proposing any initiative measure has obtained signatures of legal voters equal to or exceeding eight percent of the votes cast for the office of governor at the last regular gubernatorial election prior to the submission of the signatures for verification, or when the person or organization demanding any referendum of an act or part of an act of the legislature has obtained a number of signatures of legal voters equal to or exceeding four percent of the votes cast for the office of governor at the last regular gubernatorial election prior to the submission of the signatures for verification, the petition containing the signatures may be submitted to the secretary of state for filing.

### **RCW**[**29A.72.170**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.170) **- Petitions—Acceptance or Rejection by Secretary of State**

The secretary of state may refuse to file any initiative or referendum petition being submitted upon any of the following grounds:

1. That the petition does not contain the information required by RCW [29A.72.110](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.110), [29A.72.120](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.120), or [29A.72.130](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.130)
2. That the petition clearly bears insufficient signatures.

(3) That the time within which the petition may be filed has expired.

In case of such refusal, the secretary of state shall endorse on the petition the word "submitted" and the date and retain the petition pending appeal. If none of the grounds for refusal exists, the secretary of state must accept and file the petition.

**RCW**[**29A.72.180**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.180) **- Petitions—Review of Refusal to File**

If the secretary of state refuses to file an initiative or referendum petition when submitted for filing, the persons submitting it for filing may, within ten days after the refusal, apply to the superior court of Thurston County for an order requiring the secretary of state to bring the petitions before the court, and for a writ of mandate to compel the secretary of state to file it. The application takes precedence over other cases and matters and must be speedily heard and determined.

If the court issues the citation and determines that the petition is legal in form and apparently contains the requisite number of signatures and was submitted for filing within the time prescribed in the Constitution, it shall issue its mandate requiring the secretary of state to file it as of the date of submission for filing. The decision of the superior court granting a writ of mandate is final.

### **RCW**[**29A.72.230**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.230) **– Petitions—Verification and Canvass of Signatures, Observers—Statistical Sampling—Initiatives to Legislature, Certification Of**

Upon the filing of an initiative or referendum petition, the secretary of state shall proceed to verify and canvass the names of the legal voters on the petition. The verification and canvass of signatures on the petition may be observed by persons representing the advocates and opponents of the proposed measure so long as they make no record of the names, addresses, or other information on the petitions or related records during the verification process except upon the order of the superior court of Thurston County.

The secretary of state may limit the number of observers to not less than two on each side, if in his or her opinion, a greater number would cause undue delay or disruption of the verification process. Any such limitation shall apply equally to both sides.

The secretary of state may use any statistical sampling techniques for this verification and canvass which have been adopted by rule as provided by chapter [**34.05**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=34.05) RCW. No petition will be rejected on the basis of any statistical method employed, and no petition will be accepted on the basis of any statistical method employed if such method indicates that the petition contains fewer than the requisite number of signatures of legal voters.

If the secretary of state finds the same name signed to more than one petition, he or she shall reject all but the first such valid signature. For an initiative to the legislature, the secretary of state shall transmit a certified copy of the proposed measure to the legislature at the opening of its session and, as soon as the signatures on the petition have been verified and canvassed, the secretary of state shall send to the legislature a certificate of the facts relating to the filing, verification, and canvass of the petition.

### **RCW**[**29A.72.240**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.240) **- Count of signatures—Review**

Any citizen dissatisfied with the determination of the secretary of state that an initiative or referendum petition contains or does not contain the requisite number of signatures of legal voters may, within five days after such determination, apply to the superior court of Thurston county for a citation requiring the secretary of state to submit the petition to said court for examination, and for a writ of mandate compelling the certification of the measure and petition, or for an injunction to prevent the certification thereof to the legislature, as the case may be. Such application and all proceedings had thereunder shall take precedence over other cases and shall be speedily heard and determined.

The decision of the superior court granting or refusing to grant the writ of mandate or injunction may be reviewed by the supreme court within five days after the decision of the superior court, and if the supreme court decides that a writ of mandate or injunction, as the case may be, should issue, it shall issue the writ directed to the secretary of state; otherwise, it shall dismiss the proceedings. The clerk of the supreme court shall forthwith notify the secretary of state of the decision of the supreme court.

### **RCW**[**29A.72.260**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.260) **- Rejected Initiatives to Legislature**

Whenever any measure proposed by initiative petition for submission to the legislature is rejected by the legislature or the legislature takes no action thereon before the end of the regular session at which it is submitted, the secretary of state shall certify the serial number and ballot title thereof to the county auditors for printing on the ballots at the next ensuing general election in like manner as initiative measures for submission to the people are certified.

### **RCW**[**29A.84.230**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.84.230) **- Violations by Signers—Petitions—Penalty**

(1) Every person who signs an initiative or referendum petition with any other than his or her true name is guilty of a class C felony punishable under RCW [**9A.20.021**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=9A.20.021).

(2) Every person who knowingly signs more than one petition for the same initiative or referendum measure or who signs an initiative or referendum petition knowing that he or she is not a legal voter or who makes a false statement as to his or her residence on any initiative or referendum petition, is guilty of a gross misdemeanor.

### **RCW**[**29A.84.261**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.84.261) **- Petitions—Improperly Signing**

The following apply to persons signing filing fee petitions prescribed by RCW [**29A.24.101**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.24.101):

(1) A person who signs a petition with any other than his or her name shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

(2) A person shall be guilty of a misdemeanor if the person knowingly: Signs more than one petition for any single candidacy of any single candidate; signs the petition when he or she is not a legal voter; or makes a false statement as to his or her residence.

### WAC 434-379-008 - Petition Requirements

(1) Petitions must be **at least** eleven inches wide by fourteen inches long.

(2) Petitions must include:

(a) The initiative or referendum number;

(b) The ballot title, which must include:

(i) The subject, not more than ten words;

(ii) The concise description, not more than thirty words; and

(iii) The question.

(c) The form and text required by:

(i) RCW [**29A.72.110**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.110) for an initiative to the legislature;

(ii) RCW [**29A.72.120**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.120) for an initiative to the people; or

(iii) RCW [**29A.72.130**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.130) for a referendum measure.

(d) The warning in RCW [**29A.72.140**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.140), printed on the front to cover at least four square inches;

(e) Numbered lines, not more than twenty, with space for each person to provide his or her:

(i) Original signature;

(ii) Printed name; and

(iii) Address, city, and zip code where registered to vote.

(f) A blank space on the bottom left-hand corner of the front side, one and one-half inch square;

(g) The full text of the measure printed on the back;

 (h) The circulator's declaration printed on the back

### **WAC 434-379-009 - Processing Filed Petitions**

(1) To allow for sufficient personnel to accept and process signed petitions, the sponsor of an initiative or referendum must make an appointment to file the signed petitions at least two business days in advance. Pursuant to RCW [**29A.72.170**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.170), the secretary of state must reject petitions until a sufficient number that meet the minimum signature requirement are filed together. If the petitions are accepted and filed, additional petitions may be submitted until the applicable deadline established by RCW [**29A.72.160**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.160). When submitting the petitions, the sponsor must also provide the text of the measure, exactly as it was printed on the circulated petitions, in electronic Microsoft Word format.

(2) Upon receipt of the petitions, the office of the secretary of state shall count the number of petitions received and provide that total to the sponsor.

(3) A petition may not be rejected merely because it includes stray marks, scribbles, notes, or highlighting as long as the printed text on the petition is not illegible.

(4) A petition may not be rejected merely because the circulator's declaration on the back side of the petition is unsigned or is signed with a stamp. (AGO 2006 No. 13; *Washington Families Standing Together v. Secretary of State Sam Reed*, Thurston County Superior Court No. 09-2-02145-4, September 8, 2009).

(5) Once a petition is submitted to the office of the secretary of state, a person may not withdraw his or her signature from a petition. Letters submitted to the secretary of state requesting the removal of a signature from a petition must be retained by the secretary as part of the public record for the petition.

(6) Each petition must be reviewed for fraud, such as patterns of similar handwriting indicating forged signatures.

(7) Each signature line must be reviewed to invalidate:

(a) Obscenities;

(b) Text that is not a name;

(c) Duplicate names;

(d) Lines that are crossed out and not readable;

(e) Lines that include a name and address that both appear to be fictitious; or

(f) Lines that are blank or unfilled.

(8) The following characteristics of a signature line do not, by themselves, invalidate the signature:

(a) A name that is fictitious with an address that does not appear to be fictitious. Lines that include a name that appears to not be fictitious but an address that does appear to be fictitious,

or vice versa;

(b) Lines that are crossed out but still readable;

(c) Lines that are missing a printed name;

(d) Lines that are missing any portion of the address;

(e) Multiple lines that have similar handwriting, as long as the signature handwriting is not similar;

(f) Lines in which the signature, printed name, or address is written in the wrong field; or

(g) Signatures, printed names, or addresses written in the margin.

(9) After each signature line has been reviewed, the remaining signatures must be counted to obtain the total number of signatures submitted. That total must be provided to the sponsor.

(10) The secretary of state must verify either a random sample of the signatures submitted using the statistical formula authorized by **RCW** [**29A.72.230**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.230) and established in **WAC** [**434-379-010**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=434-379-010), or all of the signatures submitted. If the measure does not qualify for the ballot based on a random sample, the secretary of state must proceed to a full check of all signatures submitted. The secretary of state must follow **WAC** [**434-379-020**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=434-379-020) to verify signatures.

### **WAC 434-379-010 - Random Sampling Procedure**

In the verification of signatures on initiative and referendum petitions, under **RCW** [**29A.72.230**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.230), the following statistical test may be employed:

(1) Take a minimum three percent random sample of the signatures submitted;

(2) Check each signature sampled to determine the number of valid signatures in the sample, the number of signatures in the sample which are invalid because the individual signing is not registered to vote or the signature is improper in form, and the number of signatures which are duplicated in the sample;

(3) Calculate an allowance for the chance error of sampling by multiplying the square root of the number of invalid signatures in the sample by 1.5;

(4) Estimate the upper limit of the number of signatures in the population which are invalid by dividing the sum of the invalid signatures in the sample and the allowance for the chance error of sampling by the sampling ratio, i.e., the number of signatures sampled divided by the number of signatures submitted;

(5) Determine the maximum allowable number of pairs of signatures in the population by subtracting the sum of the number of signatures required by Article II, Section 1 of the Washington state Constitution and the estimate of the upper limit of the number of invalid signatures in the population from the number of signatures submitted;

(6) Determine the expected number of pairs of signatures in the sample by multiplying the square of the sampling ratio by the maximum allowable number of pairs of signatures in the population;

(7) Determine the acceptable number of pairs of signatures in the sample by subtracting 1.65 times the square root of the expected number of pairs of signatures in the sample from the expected number of pairs of signatures in the sample;

(8) If the number of pairs of signatures in the sample is greater than the acceptable number of pairs of signatures in the sample, each signature shall be canvassed to determine the exact number of valid signatures;

(9) If the number of pairs of signatures in the sample is less than the acceptable number of pairs of signatures in the sample, the petition shall be deemed to contain sufficient signatures and the serial number and ballot title shall be certified to the state legislature as provided in RCW [**29A.72.230**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.230) or to the county auditors as provided in RCW [**29A.72.250**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.72.250).

### **WAC 434-379-012 - Acceptance of Signatures**

(1) The secretary of state must determine if the person who signed a petition is registered to vote. The information may be researched in voter registration records using first name, last name, address, or any combination thereof. A signature may not be rejected merely because:

(a) The person signed with a middle name, nickname, or initials instead of the first name in the voter registration records, as long as the handwriting is clearly the same;

(b) The last name on the petition differs from the last name in the voter registration records, as long as the addresses and the handwriting on the first name are clearly the same;

(c) The last name on the petition or in the voter registration records is hyphenated while the last name in the other source is not;

(d) The first name and last name on the petition are reversed in the voter registration records;

(e) The address on the petition does not match the address in the voter registration records;

(f) The handwriting on the printed name or address does not match the handwriting on the signature; or

(g) The voter is on inactive status.

(2) If the secretary of state is unable to locate the person in the voter registration records, the signature shall be rejected as not registered to vote.

(3) If the person is registered to vote, the signature on the petition sheet must be matched to the signature in the person's voter registration record using the standards in **WAC** [**434-379-020**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=434-379-020). If the signature on the petition:

(a) Is handwritten and matches the signature in the voter registration record according to the standards in WAC [**434-379-020**](http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=434-379-020), the signature must be accepted.

(b) Does not match the signature in the voter registration record, the signature must be rejected.

(c) Matches the signature in the voter registration record but another signature on the petition has already been accepted for that voter, the subsequent signature must be rejected as a duplicate.

### **WAC 434-379-020 - Signature Verification Standard**

A signature on a petition sheet must be matched to the signature on file in the voter registration records. The following characteristics must be utilized to evaluate signatures to determine whether they are by the same writer:

(1) The signature is handwritten.

(2) Agreement in style and general appearance, including basic construction, skill, alignment, fluency, and a general uniformity and consistency between signatures;

(3) Agreement in the proportions of individual letters, height to width, and heights of the upper to lower case letters;

(4) Irregular spacing, slants, or sizes of letters that are duplicated in both signatures;

(5) After considering the general traits, agreement of the most distinctive, unusual traits of the signatures.

A single distinctive trait is insufficient to conclude that the signatures are by the same writer. There must be a combination or cluster of shared characteristics. Likewise, there must be a cluster of differences to conclude that the signatures are by different writers.