Voting for the House of Representatives and the Senate

Voting for the House of Representatives

When voting for the House of Representatives electors are choosing one person to represent their electorate (or electoral division) in the parliament. Each state and territory is divided into electorates, which contain as near as possible equal numbers of electors.

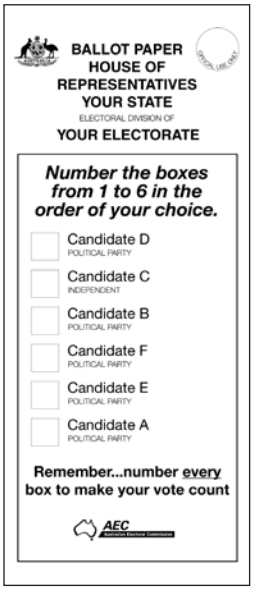
The House of Representatives uses the full preferential voting system and requires successful candidates to gain more than 50% of the formal votes. Candidates are listed on the ballot paper along with the names of their political parties. Some candidates do not belong to any political party and are known as independents. House of Representatives ballot papers are green.

The order of candidates on the ballot paper is determined by a double random draw. The first draw gives each candidate a number and the second draw determines the order in which each candidate appears on the ballot paper.

Political parties and individual candidates usually provide a 'How to Vote Card' which advises voters about how to direct their preferences (or order their votes on the ballot paper).

Voters fill in a ballot paper by writing the number 1 in the box next to the candidate of their first preference, number 2 next to their second preference, and so on until all the boxes are numbered in the order of choice.

To be elected a candidate in each electorate must receive an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the formal vote.


BALLOT PAPER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
YOUR STATE
ELECTORAL DIVISION OF
YOUR ELECTORATE

Number the boxes from 1 to 6 in the order of your choice.

Candidate D
POLITICAL PARTY
Candidate C
INDEPENDENT
Candidate B
POLITICAL PARTY
Candidate F
POLITICAL PARTY
Candidate E
POLITICAL PARTY
Candidate A
POLITICAL PARTY

Remember...number every box to make your vote count

AEC

A Ballot paper for the House of Representatives

FROM THE MARGIN

MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT

The party or coalition of parties which wins the majority of seats (electorates) forms the government in the House of Representatives.

A formal vote is a ballot paper that has been correctly filled in. It means it will be counted. An informal ballot paper is an incorrectly marked ballot paper; it will not be counted.

Voting for the Senate

When voting for the Senate, electors are choosing a group of candidates to represent their state or territory (12 per state or two per territory). The order of the candidates' names on the ballot paper is determined by a double random draw, as for the House of Representatives. The state and territory borders are the electorate boundaries.

The Senate also uses a full preferential voting system but voters have a choice of two ways to express their preferences.

Senate ballot papers are white and are divided into two sections by a black line. Electors can vote either above the line or below the line.

If electors choose to vote above the line they only put a number 1 in the box above the party or the group they want to support. Their preferences will be counted the way the party or group has registered them with the AEC. This is called a group voting ticket.

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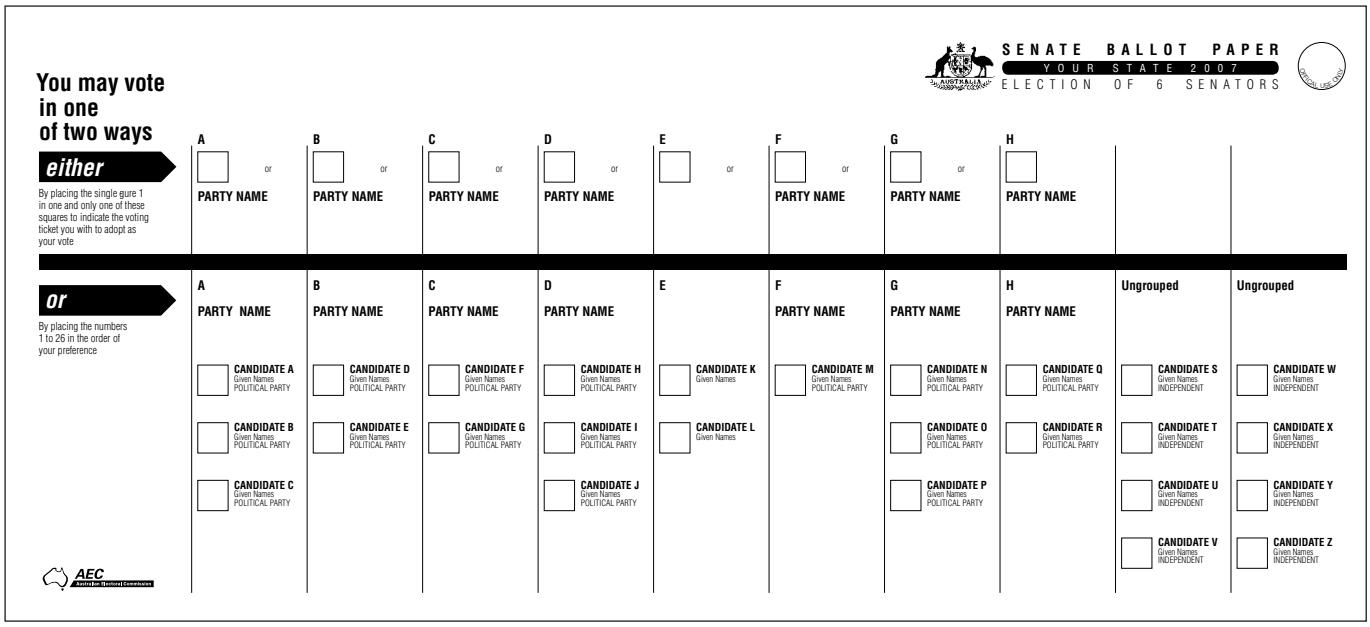

A ballot paper for the Australian Senate

Above-the-line voting was introduced in 1984. It led to a marked reduction in the level of informal voting in the Senate (see table below).

Voters may also decide on their own preferences by voting below the line.

If electors choose to vote below the line, they vote the same way as they do in the House of Representatives, putting a number 1 in the box next to the candidate of their first choice and 2 next to the candidate of their second choice, and so on until all the boxes have been completed.

To count the vote, the Senate uses a proportional representation system.

To be elected a candidate must receive a *quota* (proportion) of the vote, which is determined by dividing the number of formal ballot papers by one more than the number of vacancies to be filled and adding 1 to the result.

$$\frac{\text{Number of formal votes}}{\text{Number of vacancies} + 1} + 1 = \text{quota}$$

LEVEL OF INFORMAL VOTING IN THE SENATE										
1949	1983	1984	1990	1993	1996	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010
10.8%	9.9%	4.7%	3.4%	2.6%	3.5%	3.2%	3.9%	3.8%	2.5%	3.7%

(Sources: Jaensch, Dean, *Elections!: How and Why Australia Votes*, Allen and Unwin, 1995, p 88; *Electoral Pocketbook,* Australian Electoral Commission, 2007, p 56 and 2010 Virtual Tally Room)

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