



Counting Instructions

Preferential

Step 1: Set up a count area

Find a table with plenty of clear space for laying out the ballot papers.

If you have been running multiple elections, sort the ballot papers into piles for each election, so you can conduct each count separately. Make sure you don't mix the ballot papers.

Make some labels with the candidates' names on them and put them on the table. This will help you keep track of the piles of ballot papers as you count.

Download and open the 'count tally sheet (preferential)' file included in the teacher's pack and select which spreadsheet template you require using the tabs at the bottom of the sheet. There are two sizes available, one for fewer than 10 candidates and one more 10 candidates or more. Fill in the election details and candidates' names for this election. You can do this as soon as nominations have closed and you know all the candidates' names.

Step 2: Formality of votes

Unfold and check each vote to see whether the ballot paper is 'formal'.

- A vote is formal when:
 - the voter has filled in the ballot paper correctly; and/or
 - the intention of the voter is clear; and
 - there is no identifying mark on the ballot paper that means the vote is not secret.

Sort the papers into two piles, formal and informal votes. Count up the number of formal and informal votes and record on the tally sheet. Add the two numbers together to get 'total votes' and record this on the tally sheet too.

To be elected, a candidate must obtain an absolute majority of the votes. To calculate the number of votes needed for a candidate to be elected, use the following formula:

$$\text{Absolute majority} = (\text{formal votes} \div 2) + 1$$

Record the number on the tally sheet. Collect all the informal votes and put to one side, as they will no longer be included in the count.

Step 3: Counting the votes

Sort the formal (or 'valid') votes into piles according to the voter's first preference (number '1') for each candidate (use the labels you created in step 1). Count how many votes are in each pile, and record this on the tally sheet under 'first preferences'.

Calculate the total valid votes by adding up the candidates' first preferences. This figure should be equal to the number of formal votes calculated in step 2 (this is a good way to quickly check you haven't miscounted any ballot papers).

	Name	Name	Name	Exhausted votes	Total valid votes
First preferences	6	+ 4	+ 5		= 15

If no candidate has received enough votes to be elected (equal to or higher than the absolute majority), you will need to begin distributing preferences.

To continue the counting process, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is excluded. In the first distribution, the votes for this candidate are deducted (recorded as a negative in the tally sheet) and redistributed to the remaining candidates. To do this, take the pile of ballot papers belonging to the candidate with the lowest number of votes recorded on the tally sheet. Sort these votes into a separate pile (do not add them to the first pile) according to which candidate was chosen as number '2'. Count the number of ballot papers in this second pile and record this number for each remaining candidate under 'first distribution'.

This candidate is excluded, having the least number of votes.

	Name	Name	Name	Name	Exhausted votes	Total votes distributed	Total valid votes
First preferences	2	5	4	4			15
First distribution	-2	1	0	1	0	2	

The votes are taken from the excluded candidate and redistributed to the remaining candidates.

The total votes distributed is also recorded. This is the sum of all votes distributed to remaining candidates (and exhausted votes, if any).

Calculate the progressive total by adding together the first preferences and first distribution for each remaining candidate.

	Name	Name	Name	Total votes distributed	Total valid votes
First preferences	5	4	1		10
First distribution	1	0	-1	1	
Progressive Total	6	4			10

Then, calculate total valid votes by adding all these totals together (including any exhausted votes, see page 4).

	Name	Name	Name	Exhausted votes	Total valid votes
Progressive Total	6	4	0	0	= 10

If no candidate has received an absolute majority, continue the counting process by excluding the candidate with the least amount of votes and distributing the votes according to the voter's next preference. This may be indicated by number '2' or '3', etc. depending on which candidates remain in the count.

This process is repeated until a candidate receives enough votes equal to or more than the absolute majority to be elected.

You can continue counting until all preferences have been distributed. This will show the order in which all candidates are elected and help you find a replacement if required before the next election.

Exhausted votes

If a formal ballot paper, during the distribution of preferences, can no longer be allocated to a candidate as there are no remaining preferences, the ballot paper becomes an 'exhausted vote'. Exhausted votes are put to one side, and recorded on the tally sheet for the distribution where the vote became exhausted.

	Name	Name	Name	Name	Exhausted votes	Total votes distributed	Total valid votes
Progressive Total	18	4	12	6	0		40
Fourth Distribution	2	-4	1	0	1	4	
Progressive Total	20		13	6	1		40

Exhausted votes are included when calculating 'total valid votes' for each progressive total row.

	Name	Name	Name	Exhausted votes	Total valid votes				
Progressive Total	20	+	13	+	6	+	1	=	40

Exhausted votes will usually only occur if voters have been instructed to number some, not all of the boxes on the ballot paper.

If the results are tied, there are many options for deciding the result. You can:

- run the election again
- select a winner through a random draw (names in a hat)
- ask a suitable person to have a casting vote
- let the winners share the position.

It is very important to decide how you will resolve a tie BEFORE you begin counting.