

Stages in an Election

1 Issuing the Writs

Writs are legal instructions. The Governor-General issues writs to the Electoral Commissioner to hold elections in the divisions for a House of Representatives election. Each State Governor issues a writ to the Australian Electoral Officer in each state for a Senate election.

2 The Electoral Roll

After the writs have been issued, citizens eligible to vote have seven days to get enrolled properly. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) updates the rolls and has them printed.

3 Nominations

Every candidate in an election must nominate. They must be Australian citizens and be qualified as electors. They have to complete an official nomination form and pay a deposit.

4 Producing Ballot Papers and Other Polling Material

Candidates' names for each division are put on the ballot paper in an order decided by a double random draw. The ballot papers are organised for printing by the AEC. Ballot boxes and voting screens also have to be made for the 9000 polling places around Australia.

5 Campaigning

Political parties and candidates begin active campaigning after the election is announced. Candidates talk about the policies and plans they have if they are elected. These policies are called a platform. They use TV, radio, newspapers, pamphlets and visits to promote their ideas.

6 Voting Arrangements

In Australia election day is always on a Saturday. Polling places for voting are open from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. There are three groups of people who have special duties at polling places: party workers, polling officials and scrutineers.

Party workers give voters how-to-vote cards so they will know how to vote for a particular candidate. No one has to take these cards and party workers are not allowed inside the polling place. Polling officials are hired by the AEC and follow the electoral laws to protect each voter's privacy. They have to ask voters to identify themselves and where they live and ask them if they have already voted in this election. The polling officials mark the person's name on the official electoral roll, initial the ballot paper, then give it to the voter. The voter goes alone to a voting screen, marks the ballot in secret, then puts the ballot paper in the sealed ballot boxes.

Scrutineers observe the election procedures but cannot tell anyone how to vote. Their job comes after the polls close when they watch how the votes are counted.

7 The Scrutiny

After the polls close, counting the votes begins. Scrutineers watch the count to make sure only formal votes are counted and counted properly. They cannot touch the ballot papers.

8 Counting the Votes

Votes are counted differently for the House of Representatives and for the Senate. In the House of Representatives, the candidate who wins majority support of an electorate wins. In the Senate elections, candidates must win a specific proportion of the electorate's votes to be elected. (For more details on counting the votes, see the Australian Democracy Magazine, February 1997).

9 Declaration of the Poll

After the winners have been determined, the elected candidates' names are announced. The Electoral Commissioner writes these names on the back of the original writs and gives them back to the Governor-General. Winners are officially announced and the membership of the new Parliament is decided.

(The content in this handout was adapted from the Australian Democracy Magazine, February 1997, published by the [Australian Electoral Commission](#).)