

Section 4

4

Voter materials

4A

Ballot papers

Function

The function of the ballot paper is to enable the voter to indicate their chosen candidate or party at an election.

To do this, the ballot paper needs to be designed in a way that makes it easy for the voter to:

- understand what the ballot paper is for
- find their chosen candidate or party
- mark their choice in such a way that their vote is valid, and reflects their intention

It should also be designed in a way that means the voter's choice can be clearly identified when the votes are counted.

Style

- Put each candidate's or party's set of details on a separate row (see Figure 1).

i Explanation

- Having individual rows helps the voter to quickly and easily find the candidate or party they want to vote for.
- Do not number the rows.

i Explanation

- Numbers can confuse voters, especially new or inexperienced voters who do not know what they mean or what they are for.
- As some elections require people to vote using numbers, it is better not to print any numbers on the ballot paper itself to avoid any confusion. This also means that ballot papers have a consistent design, whichever voting system is in use. This is particularly important if there is a combined election with voting systems using both numbers and Xs.
- Removing numbers also creates more space and reduces the overall amount of information on the page.

- Do not use a grid format to separate the different sections of the ballot paper. Use a horizontal line beneath each row (including after the last row in the list) to separate it from the next row. The line should extend from the start of the text to the logo (see Figure 1).

i Explanation

- A grid creates boxes on the page which can confuse the voter if the instructions refer to marking in 'a box'. It is more straightforward to have one set of individual boxes in which to mark your vote. This also makes the paper look less cluttered.
- One horizontal line is a clear, simple way of separating one row from the next. Putting a line after the last row indicates that it is the end of the list.

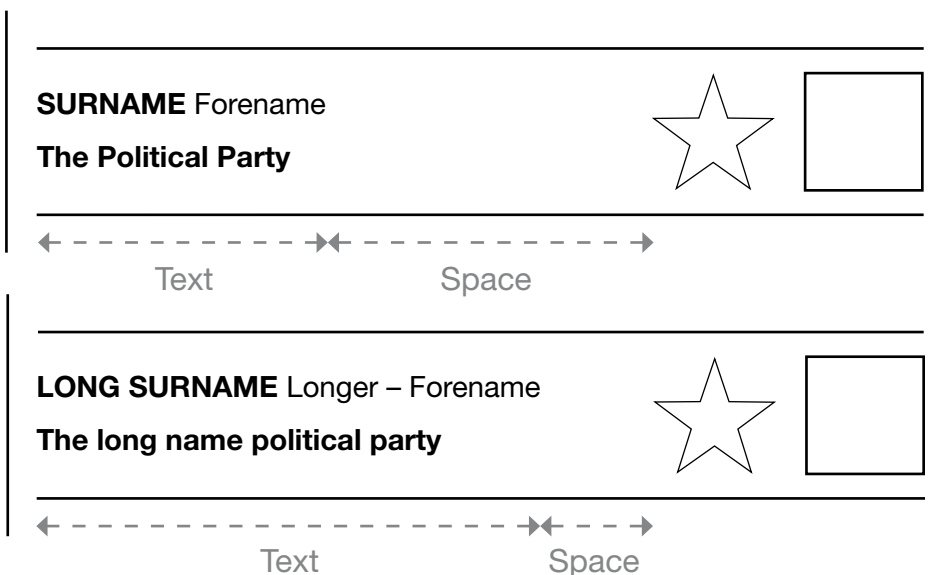
- Have individual boxes for voting, at the right-hand end of each row.
 - The box should be square and its height slightly less than the height of the row (to allow for a small space between each box).
 - The box should be big enough for the voter to easily make their mark inside it.

i Explanation

- Having individual boxes makes it clearer to the voter where they need to make their mark, and that these are the boxes referred to in the instructions.

- The longest line of text will be the main factor that determines the overall width of the rows, and therefore will also determine the width of the ballot paper.
- As the candidate or party details are left-aligned, and the voting box and logo are towards the right of each row, there will be a blank space in the right-hand half of the row between the text and the logo. The size (length) of this space will vary, depending on how much space is taken up by the text, as shown in Figure 1.
- As a minimum, this space should be equal to the width of the logo.
- Ideally, there should be more text than blank space on the row. However the longest line of text will determine the width of the rows, which may mean in practice that there are some rows which have more blank space than text.
- You might need to alter the width of the paper to keep the spacing in the right proportions (see Figure 1). The width of the margin at the right and left edges of the page can also be adjusted if necessary (though avoid having a very large margin).
- If there is no logo, treat the row as if there is one, for consistency, i.e. leave an equivalent space (unless none of the candidates are using a logo).

Figure 1



i Explanation

- Keeping the logo and voting box close to candidate or party information maintains the link between them. This helps the voter to find the voting box for the candidate or party of their choice and to put their mark in the correct place.

Content and structure

- Put the election and ballot paper title at the top of the ballot paper:
 - first line: the name of the election
 - second line: what the ballot paper is for (e.g. ‘Ballot paper to elect the [position] for [electoral area]’)

i Explanation

- The title identifies the ballot paper, links it to other documents used at the election, and reminds the voter what they are voting for.
- This helps people at elections where there is more than one ballot paper to distinguish between them, and to find the right instructions (which will refer to the names of the different ballot papers).

- Put information about voting underneath the title:
 - what mark to use for your vote at this election (X or numbers)
 - how many candidates or parties you can vote for

i Explanation

- This gives the voter all the information they need to know before they start voting. Putting it at the top of the ballot paper means they are more likely to see and read it.

- Include specific instructions on how to vote underneath the title, above the list of candidates or parties:
 - how to mark your vote on the ballot paper, and where on the ballot paper you should do this (and how many candidates or parties you can mark)

i Explanation

- Including specific instructions helps to make sure that the voter is clear about exactly how to vote on that particular ballot paper.
- Putting the instructions on the ballot paper means that the voter can see them at the point they are needed (i.e. just before carrying out the action), rather than relying on other guidance or notices which are often overlooked.

- Allow flexibility in the wording of the instructions, so that if there are no independent candidates standing, they are not referred to.

i Explanation

- Being flexible about specific elements of the notice means the notice can be adapted to keep it accurate, so that it does not confuse or mislead the voter.
- Accompany the written instructions with a diagram to show how to mark the ballot paper. Place this above the voting boxes, with an arrow pointing to them, to show where the voter should make their mark on the ballot paper.

i Explanation

- A diagram helps to visually explain and reinforce the written instruction. Also useful for people who have difficulty in reading or following written instructions.
- Layout of a row:
 - candidate information at the start of the row (i.e. starting at the left-hand side)
 - voting box at the right-hand end of the row
 - logo immediately to the left of the voting box (remember to left-align text)

i Explanation

- A left-to-right sequence follows the normal layout for how people read written English.
- Having the voting box on the right means that the voter can read the candidate/party information first, and then mark the box after it, as the last part of the 'task'.
- Having the logo next to the voting box helps the voter to find the candidate/party of their choice and to check that they are marking the right box.
- Layout of candidate/party details:

For an individual candidate:

- candidate name on the top line
 - surname first in bold capital letters
 - forename(s) following surname in title case, not bold (unless there are two candidates with the same surname, in which case the forenames of those candidates should be in bold)
 - minimum 14 point font
- party name on the next line
 - sentence case
 - bold
 - smaller than candidate name – minimum 12 point font
- party description (if the candidate wants to include one) on the next line
 - sentence case
 - normal text (not bold)
 - minimum 12 point font

For a party:

- party name on the top line
 - sentence case
 - bold
 - minimum 14 point font
- party description (if the party wants to include one) on the next line
 - sentence case
 - normal text (not bold)
 - minimum 12 point font

Explanation

- A top-to-bottom sequence follows the normal layout for how people read written English.
 - The main information should come first and be prominent: if you are voting for a candidate, their name; if you are voting for a party, the party name.
- On party list ballot papers, independent candidates should be included in the alphabetical order (not listed after the registered parties).

For ballot papers with two columns of candidates/parties

Ideally, ballot papers should have one column, as long as this still allows the ballot paper to be designed in line with the rest of this guidance (e.g. in terms of font size), and does not make the ballot paper physically unmanageable. If it is not possible or practical to avoid having two columns, then:

- Do not separate the two columns with a vertical line down the middle.

Explanation

- Have a blank space between the first and second columns. A printed vertical line implies that the columns are separate from one another, rather than being part of the same list, which could lead the voter to think that they can or must vote for a candidate or party in each column.

- Try to position the title and instructions so that they span the top of both columns.

Explanation

- Spreading the title and instructions across both columns helps to reinforce that the columns are part of one list, and one ballot.
- Only do this if there is enough text – do not centre-align the text or stretch it out just to fit across the width of the columns. If necessary, indent the start of the line of text further in from the edge of the paper than usual.

- Have one diagram (not two) showing how to mark your vote on the ballot paper, and where on the paper you should do this.
- Do not include an arrow pointing to the voting boxes.

Explanation

- Having one diagram avoids confusion about the columns, as two diagrams could lead the voter to think that they can or must vote for a candidate or party in each column.
- Leaving out the arrow avoids leading the voter to vote in a particular column.