

Postal voting guidance

Function

Postal voting can be a complex process, involving at least two documents the voter must complete, plus two envelopes in which to enclose and return the documents. Postal voters therefore need guidance to explain the process, just as polling station voters have notices in polling stations and booths to guide them.

Style

The general style guidance in Section 3A should be followed when producing guidance for postal voters.



Style
(Section 3A)

Content and structure

- Include a ‘quick-start’ guide with the postal voting pack to summarise what is in the pack and the main things the voter needs to do, and when.⁸



Explanation

- A ‘quick-start’ guide is more likely to be read than more detailed information (think of manuals that come with electrical goods). A ‘quick-start’ guide gives the voter an easy way of finding out what is in the pack, what each document is for, and what they need to do.
- The guide will also help the voter to know where to start the postal voting process, i.e. what they should do first. It is a good place to put extra information that may not be suitable for the voter materials themselves.
- In polling stations, notices are displayed to guide voters through the voting process. A ‘quick-start’ guide can do the same for postal voters.
- Avoid including too much detailed information – it should be a brief reference guide.

⁸ Example ‘quick-start’ guides for different types of election can be downloaded from the Do Politics Centre on our website at www.dopolitics.org.uk

- Use specific postal voting materials for proxy voters, and for voters who have been granted a signature waiver, which are different to those for other postal voters.

i Explanation

- Using specific materials for different groups of voters allows the instructions and content to be tailored to the person voting, and their requirements. For example, a voter who has been granted a signature waiver will not need a signature box, or instructions about providing their signature.
 - Using specific materials tailored to the person voting means you do not have to include instructions for all circumstances on every postal voting statement, and helps to avoid instructions being ambiguous. References to different processes for proxy and waiver voting can confuse other voters, who are not familiar with those terms and do not know what they mean, or whether they apply to them.
- Provide pictorial guidance on a separate sheet, so the voter can refer to it at the same time as the postal voting statement/ declaration of identity. Do not put it on the back of the statement. Ensure that any labelling or numbering corresponds with what is used in the written instructions.

i Explanation

- Having pictorial guidance on a separate sheet makes it easier to use. This means the voter has more help available to them and therefore a better chance of completing the process correctly.
- Make sure that instructions and guidance are visible to the voter throughout the process of completing their postal vote, and are not obscured at any stage (e.g. during the process of folding the documents and putting them into the relevant envelopes).

i Explanation

- The voter needs to be able to see the instructions and guidance in order to follow them correctly, and to be able to check that they are doing the right thing. This also gives reassurance and reduces the likelihood of them making a mistake.

- For both written and pictorial guidance, put instructions in order vertically, in portrait layout, not horizontally, in landscape layout. There should be one 'column' of instructions which flows from top to bottom. Consider using arrows to indicate the flow and direct the reader from one to the next.

i **Explanation**

- A vertical order makes the instructions easier to follow, as there is no ambiguity about what order they go in. With a horizontal (landscape) layout, the order could be down or across, or both, which can be confusing.

- Include a checklist of things the voter should have done before they return their vote:
 - Put it either on envelope B, or in the 'quick-start' guide, or somewhere else where it is clearly visible.
 - Do not put it on one of the documents that needs to be returned inside envelope B, as then it will not be visible to the voter when they are about to return their vote.

i **Explanation**

- A checklist acts as an easy reference for the voter and helps to make sure they send everything back, and do not miss out any of the documents that they need to return for their vote to count.