

Ballot Format & Mail Ballot Packet Materials Checklist



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Certification & Training Program

Requirements and best practices for overall design, layout,
and content for ballots and mail ballot packet components.

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*This informational publication is intended to provide Washington State elections administrators a guide to ballot design and layout rules and best practices. (RCW 29A.36.161; WAC 434-230-012)
It is the responsibility of the County Auditor to ensure ballots are compliant with all current laws and requirements.*

OVERALL BALLOT LAYOUT

Overall Design | RCW 29A.36.161; WAC 434-230-012

- 1. Allow instructions to occupy their own column, if space allows.
- 2. Avoid use of ALL CAP letters, centered type, and using more than one font.
- 3. If space allows, use a 12-point type. Avoid type size lower than 8-point.
- 4. Consistent use of shading and/or color.
- 5. Consistent font and type size for all races.

Main Heading | WAC 434-230-015(1)

- 1. County.
- 2. Date.
- 3. Primary, Special or General.

Overall Instructions; printed on ballot itself | RCW 29A.36.161; WAC 434-230-015(2)

- 1. How to mark the ballot.
- 2. How to mark a write-in vote when candidate races appear.
- 3. Clear delineation between the instructions and the first ballot measure or office through the use of white space, illustration, shading, color, symbol, font size, or bold type.
- 4. PDC statement (or graphic) as cited in RCW 29A.36.161; must be printed on the ballot unless it is printed on the envelope *and* in accompanying materials.

PDC Graphic:



OVERALL BALLOT LAYOUT (CONT.)

Instructions; printed on ballot in either overall instructions or in heading of each race |
WAC 434-230-015

- 1. Number of candidates for whom the voter may vote (e.g., “vote for one”).

Color | WAC 434-230-015(7)

Optional:

- 1. May use varying sizes and colors of ballots if used consistently throughout the region, area, or jurisdiction; may also be used to differentiate between official ballots and provisional or sample ballots. Per RCW 29A.36.115 and WAC 434-230-010, provisional and sample ballots must be visually distinguishable from the official ballot.

ORDER OF OFFICES AND MEASURES ON BALLOT

Measures and offices must be listed in the following order, to the extent that they
appear on a primary or election ballot | RCW 29A.36.121, RCW 29A.72.290; WAC
434-230-025

- 1. Initiatives to the people;
- 2. Referendum measures;
- 3. Referendum bills;
- 4. Initiatives to the legislature and any alternate proposals;
- 5. Advisory votes;
- 6. Proposed constitutional amendments (senate joint resolutions, then house joint resolutions);
- 7. Countywide ballot measures;
- 8. President and vice president of the United States;
- 9. United States senator;

List continued on next page...

ORDER OF OFFICES AND MEASURES ON BALLOT (CONT.)

- 10. United States representative;
- 11. Governor;
- 12. Lieutenant governor;
- 13. Secretary of state;
- 14. State treasurer;
- 15. State auditor;
- 16. Attorney general;
- 17. Commissioner of public lands;
- 18. Superintendent of public instruction;
- 19. Insurance commissioner;
- 20. State senator;
- 21. State representative;
- 22. County officers;
- 23. Justices of the supreme court;
- 24. Judges of the court of appeals;
- 25. Judges of the superior court; and
- 26. Judges of the district court.
- 27. For all other jurisdictions, the offices in each jurisdiction shall be grouped together and listed by position number according to county auditor procedures.

OFFICE FORMAT ON BALLOT

Office Name | WAC 434-230-035(1)

1. Name of each office

Office Descriptions | WAC 434-230-035(2)

1. "Partisan Office" must be printed either for each partisan office **or** as a heading above a group of partisan offices.
2. "Nonpartisan Office" must be printed either at each nonpartisan office **or** as a heading above a group of nonpartisan offices.

Term Description | WAC 434-230-035(3)

1. Required **only** if term is other than a full term. Print a description of the term (e.g., short/full, two-year unexpired) with the office name.

Write-in Area; following each list of candidates | WAC 434-230-035(4)

1. Response position (target area) and space to write in a candidate name. Do **not** provide a write-in line for precinct committee officer positions.

Separator Line | WAC 434-230-035(5)

1. Bold line separating each office or position.

CANDIDATE FORMAT ON BALLOT

List of Candidate Names | WAC 434-230-045(1) and (3)

- 1. For each office or position, list all candidates together in one column. If unable to place all candidates in one column, contact the Secretary of State's Office.
- 2. Print candidates' names in a type style and point size that can be easily read. Fonts may be adjusted to fit a long candidate name if necessary, but avoid using type size lower than 8-point.

Order of Candidates; other than President & Vice President | WAC 434-230-045(2)(a) and (2)(b)

Party preferences stated by candidates do not affect the order in which candidate names are listed.
WAC 434-230-045(2)(c)

- 1. Primary candidates listed in lot draw order.
- 2. General election candidates listed in vote-getting order, highest first. If the two candidates who received the most votes in the primary received exactly the same number of votes, the order in which their names are listed on the general election ballot is determined by lot. If a primary was not held for the position, the candidates appear in lot draw order.

Nonpartisan Candidate Format | WAC 434-230-045(5)

- 1. Only the candidate's name is printed. Neither "nonpartisan" nor "NP" appears with the candidate's name.

Partisan Candidate Format | WAC 434-230-015, WAC 434-230-045

- 1. See "Partisan Offices on Ballot" and "Partisan Office Ballot Packet Inserts and Instructions" sections.

PARTISAN OFFICES ON BALLOT

Ballot Instructions printed on ballot itself; for a non-Presidential primary or general election with a partisan office | WAC 434-230-015(6)(a)

1. Party preference notice printed on the ballot:

“READ: Each candidate for partisan office may state a political party that he or she prefers. A candidate’s preference does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party, or that the party approves of or associates with that candidate.”

2. Print notice in bold print.

3. Print notice immediately **above** the first partisan congressional, state or county office.

Partisan Candidates and Party Preference Format | WAC 434-230-045(4)(a-d)

Partisan candidates may state a political party preference; but it is not a requirement for candidates to state a preference. No nominations or endorsements are printed on the ballot.

When a party preference is stated:

1. Print party preference exactly as noted on the declaration, “(Prefers _____ Party).”
2. Print party preference below or to the right of the candidate’s name within parentheses.
3. Capitalize first letter of each word.
4. Print exactly the same party preference on both primary and general election ballots.

Optional:

1. Party preference may be indented or printed in smaller font.

PARTISAN OFFICES ON BALLOT (CONT.)

Partisan Candidates and Party Preference Format | WAC 434-230-045(4)(a-d)

When no party preference is stated:

- 1. Print "(States No Party Preference)."
- 2. Print information below or to the right of the candidate's name within parentheses.
- 3. Capitalize first letter of each word.
- 4. Print exactly the same information on both primary and general election ballots.

Optional:

- 1. Information may be indented or printed in smaller font.

PARTISAN OFFICE BALLOT PACKET INSERTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Primary with a Partisan Office - Separate Insert Required | WAC 434-230-015(3)(m)

1. For a **primary** with a partisan office, a separate insert must be printed and included with each ballot packet. It must state the following:

“In each race, you may vote for any one candidate listed. The two candidates who receive the most votes in the Primary will advance to the General Election.

Each candidate for partisan office may state a political party that he or she prefers. A candidate’s preference does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party, or that the party approves of or associates with that candidate.”

General Election with a Partisan Office – Additional Instructions Required – On the Ballot, Insert, or the Security or Return Envelopes | WAC 434-230-015(n)(i)

1. For a **general** election with a partisan office, these instructions must be provided, but can be included anywhere in the ballot packet (on the ballot, envelope, or an insert):

“If a primary election was held for an office, the two candidates who received the most votes in the Primary advanced to the General Election.

Each candidate for partisan office may state a political party that he or she prefers. A candidate’s preference does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party, or that the party approves of or associates with that candidate.”

MAIL BALLOT PACKET REQUIREMENTS

Outer Mailing Envelope | RCW 29A.40.091(1); WAC 434-250-070

- 1. The calendar date of the election must be prominently displayed on the outer mailing envelope in bold, 20-point font or larger. This is required on all mail ballot packets:
 - For the primary and general elections in 2021.
 - For all elections in 2022 and after.
- 2. Display the elections logo according to [USPS “Official Elections Mail – Graphic Guidelines and Logos” Publication 631](#).
- 3. Utilize postal service endorsements that allow ballots to be forwarded, allow the county auditor to receive the updated address information for forwarded ballots, and allow the return of ballots not capable of being forwarded.

Optional:

- 1. County branding and/or logo.

Return Envelope | RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-230-015, WAC 434-230-130, WAC 434-230-135

- 1. Addressed to the County Auditor’s Office.
- 2. A hole punched in a manner that will reveal whether the security envelope/sleeve is inside.
- 3. Display the elections logo according to [USPS “Official Elections Mail – Graphic Guidelines and Logos” Publication 631](#).
- 4. Prepaid return postage.

Optional:

- 1. County branding and/or logo.
- 2. Label/identify “Return” envelope.

MAIL BALLOT PACKET REQUIREMENTS (CONT.)

Security Envelope or Sleeve | RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-230-015, WAC 434-230-130

- 1. Hole punched in a manner that will reveal whether a ballot is inside.
- 2. Must **not** include information that could be used to identify the voter.

Optional:

- 1. Additional instruction and/or county branding.
- 2. Label “security” envelope or sleeve.

Additional Instructions – On the Ballot, Insert, or the Security or Return Envelopes
| RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-230-015

These required instructions may be located on the ballot, on a separate insert, on the return envelope, or on the security envelope/sleeve.

- 1. Print complete ballot declaration as cited in WAC 434-230-015.*
- 2. Space for the voter to sign and date the declaration, write their phone number, and for two witnesses to sign.*
- 3. Instructions on how to complete and sign the ballot declaration.*
- 4. Explanation on how the voter may make a mark, witnessed by two other people, if the voter is unable to write their signature.*
- 5. Explanation that power of attorney cannot be used to sign a ballot for someone else.*
- 6. Notice that in order to be counted, the ballot must be either postmarked no later than Election Day or deposited at a designated deposit site no later than 8pm Election Day.*
- 7. How to cancel/correct/change a vote by drawing a line through the text of the candidate’s name or ballot response. Graphic is optional. Wording should not require the voter to mark another choice.
- 8. Notice about overvoting.

List continued on next page...

* Commonly located on the Return Envelope

MAIL BALLOT PACKET REQUIREMENTS (CONT.)

Additional Instructions – On the Ballot, Insert, or the Security or Return Envelopes
| RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-230-015

- 9. How to place the ballot in the security envelope/sleeve, and the security envelope/sleeve into the return envelope.
- 10. How to obtain a replacement ballot if the original ballot is destroyed, spoiled, or lost.
- 11. Explain how the voter may update their address.
- 12. How a voter can learn about the locations, hours, and services of voting centers and ballot deposit sites, including accessibility of AVUs.
- 13. If Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) statement (or graphic) is not printed on the ballot, it must be printed in two locations on the accompanying ballot materials. See checklist item #4 from “Overall Ballot Layout – Overall Instructions”.
- 14. For reissued ballots, explain that the reissued ballot is the current ballot.

Optional:

- 1. Any further information the County Auditor deems necessary.

When the County Auditor is a Candidate on the Ballot | RCW 29A.40.091(5)

- 1. The **County Auditor’s** name may not appear on the security envelope, return envelope, or any voting instructions or materials included with the ballot when the Auditor is a candidate during the same year.

OVERSEAS AND SERVICE MAIL BALLOT PACKET REQUIREMENTS

- 1. Include all checklist items from “Mail Ballot Packet Requirements”.
- 2. Include all checklist items from “Partisan Office Ballot Packet Inserts and Instructions” if applicable.
- 3. Include all checklist items from “President & Vice President Ballot Packet Instructions” if applicable.

In addition to the above listed items, overseas and service voter mail ballot packets must also include the following:

Return Envelope | RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-235-030

- 1. For return postage, use the federal postage-paid indicia as authorized by 39 USC 3406 using the DMM 703.8.0 permit.

Separate Insert Required – Privacy/Secrecy Sheet | RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-235-030

- 1. A ballot privacy sheet that can be placed between the declaration page and the ballot for electronic return. Information printed on this sheet must **not** include the declaration or information that could be used to identify the voter.

Additional Instructions Required – On the Ballot, Insert, or the Security or Return Envelopes | WAC 434-235-030

These required instructions may be located on the ballot, on a separate insert, on the return envelope, or on the security envelope/sleeve.

- 1. The mailing address, phone number, fax number, email address, and website of the County Auditor’s Office to enable a voter to contact the elections office for additional information about the election.
- 2. How to return the ballot by fax, email, or postal mail.
- 3. How to insert the privacy sheet between the declaration and the voted ballot for electronic return.
- 4. How to confirm the voted ballot arrived in the elections office. Provide this information in a format the voter can keep after the voted ballot has been returned.

PRECINCT COMMITTEE OFFICER RACES ON BALLOT

Precinct Committee Officers (PCOs) | RCW 29A.52.171, RCW 29A.80.051; WAC 434-230-100(2)

PCO races appear on the Primary ballot in each even-numbered year. Only contested races appear on the ballot. Each major party has a PCO position in each precinct. Candidates compete only against other PCO candidates of the same political party. Only positions with two or more candidates appear on the ballot. If only one candidate files for a position, that candidate is deemed elected and does not appear on the ballot. If no candidates file for a position, the race does not appear on the ballot.

PCOs – Office Location | RCW 29A.52.171; WAC 434-230-100(4)

- 1. Contested PCO races follow all measures and public offices on a consolidated ballot. If a physically separate ballot is used for PCO elections, it must be distinguishable from the Top Two Primary ballot.

PCOs – Office Format | RCW 29A.52.171; WAC 434-230-100(4)

- 1. Clear delineation from other races.
- 2. PCO explanation printed before the list of candidates:

“For this office only: In order to vote for precinct committee officer, a partisan office, you must affirm that you are a Democrat or a Republican and may vote only for one candidate from the party you select. Your vote for a candidate affirms your affiliation with the same party as the candidate. This preference is private and will not be matched to your name or shared.”
- 3. If all candidates are listed under one heading, the applicable party abbreviation “Dem” or “Rep” must be printed next to each candidate’s name, or, if candidates are listed under a major political party heading, the applicable heading of either “Democratic Party Candidates” or “Republican Party Candidates” must be printed above each group.
- 4. The applicable affirmation statement must be printed directly below each candidate’s name: “I affirm I am a Democrat,” or “I affirm I am a Republican.”
- 5. Lines/spaces for write-in candidates must **not** be printed for PCO races.

PRECINCT COMMITTEE OFFICER RACES ON BALLOT (CONT.)

PCOs – Order of Candidates | WAC 434-230-100(3)

1. When both party positions qualify to appear on the same ballot, candidates of the political party that received the highest number of votes for President at the last presidential election must appear first.
2. **Within** each party, PCO candidates appear in lot draw order.

PCO Examples – Single Heading:

Precinct Committee Officer

For this office only: In order to vote for precinct committee officer, a partisan office, you must affirm that you are a Democrat or a Republican and may vote only for one candidate from the party you select. Your vote for a candidate affirms your affiliation with the same party as the candidate. This preference is private and will not be matched to your name or shared.

Vote for one

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Jimmy Smith | Dem |
| | I affirm I am a Democrat | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Sue Thomas | Dem |
| | I affirm I am a Democrat | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Charlie Miller | Rep |
| | I affirm I am a Republican | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Jane Doe | Rep |
| | I affirm I am a Republican | |

PRECINCT COMMITTEE OFFICER RACES ON BALLOT (CONT.)

PCO Examples – Separate Headings:

Precinct Committee Officer

For this office only: In order to vote for precinct committee officer, a partisan office, you must affirm that you are a Democrat or a Republican and may vote only for one candidate from the party you select. Your vote for a candidate affirms your affiliation with the same party as the candidate. This preference is private and will not be matched to your name or shared.

Vote for one

DEMOCRATIC PARTY CANDIDATES

- Jimmy Smith
I affirm I am a Democrat
- Sue Thomas
I affirm I am a Democrat

REPUBLICAN PARTY CANDIDATES

- Charlie Miller
I affirm I am a Republican
- Jane Doe
I affirm I am a Republican

PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT OFFICE ON BALLOT

President & Vice President; office and candidate format | RCW 29A.36.161; WAC 434-230-035(6), WAC 434-230-015, WAC 434-230-110

- 1. Pair the President and Vice President nominees' names by party.
- 2. Provide one response position (target area) for each political party's pair of nominees.
- 3. List candidates in order certified by the Secretary of State per RCW 29A.36.161.
- 4. Print full name of the political party for each pair, preceding the word 'Nominees.'
Example: "Example Party Nominees"
- 5. If not nominees of a political party, print description as "Independent Candidates."
- 6. Format does **not** use parentheses.
- 7. Capitalize first letter of each word.

Optional:

- 1. Information may be indented or printed in smaller font.

Example:

President / Vice President of the United States

Vote for one

- John Smith / Jane Doe
Example Party Nominees

President & Vice President; instructions printed on ballot itself | WAC 434-230-015(6)

- 1. Party preference notice printed on the ballot:

"READ: Each candidate for President and Vice President is the official nominee of a political party. For other partisan offices, each candidate may state a political party that he or she prefers. A candidate's preference does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party, or that the party approves of or associates with that candidate."
- 2. Print notice in bold print.
- 3. Print notice immediately **after** President and Vice President, but immediately **above** the first partisan congressional, state or county office.

PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT BALLOT PACKET INSTRUCTIONS

President & Vice President; additional Instructions Required | WAC 434-230-015(n)(ii)

1. For a general election with **President & Vice President**, these instructions must be provided, but can be included anywhere in the ballot packet (on the ballot, envelope, or an insert):

“If a primary election was held for an office, the two candidates who received the most votes in the Primary advanced to the General Election.

Each candidate for partisan office may state a political party that he or she prefers. A candidate’s preference does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party, or that the party approves of or associates with that candidate.

The election for President and Vice President is different. Candidates for President and Vice President are the official nominees of their political party.”

Optional:

1. In addition to the PDC statement (or graphic), see checklist item #4 from “Overall Ballot Layout – Overall Instructions”, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) statement may also be provided: “For a list of the people and organizations that donated to Presidential candidates’ campaigns, visit www.fec.gov.”

Presidential Primary | RCW 29A.36.161, RCW 29A.40.091; WAC 434-219

See current “[Presidential Primary Ballot Checklist](#)” publication.

For questions about the Ballot Format Checklist, please contact the Certification & Training Program, Elections Division, Office of the Secretary of State at (360) 902-4180 or ctsupport@sos.wa.gov