

Robert's Rules for Voting by Ballot

By [C. Alan Jennings, PRP](#) from [Robert's Rules For Dummies](#)

Ballot voting is the preferred voting method in situations in which knowing how all the members voted isn't desirable. You can use a ballot vote to decide either a motion or an election:

- **If the ballot vote decides a motion**, the question is clearly stated by the chair, and you're instructed to mark your ballot *Yes* or *No* (or *For* or *Against*).
- **If the ballot vote decides an election**, you're instructed to write the name of the nominee of your choice on your ballot.

It's never in order to vote *Yes* or *No* (or *For* or *Against*) a candidate when electing persons to office. The only way you can vote *against* a candidate is to vote *for* another person.

Who gets to vote

Balloting may take place during a meeting, or polls may be open during polling periods including times when no meeting is in progress. In either case, you need to appoint reliable tellers to hand out and collect ballots and to count the votes.

Only members entitled to vote are given ballots or are allowed to deposit ballots with a teller or place them in the ballot receptacle. The presiding officer votes along with all the other members, although she is *never* allowed to cast a tie-breaker in a ballot vote.

A member has the right to vote until the polls are closed. A late-arriving member can vote only with other members' consent by majority vote.

Counting the ballots

When counting ballots, tellers need to keep a few key points in mind:

- Blank votes are treated as scrap paper and don't count at all.
- Illegal votes cast by legal voters count toward the total votes cast, but they don't count for any individual choice or candidate. Illegal votes are
 - Unintelligible ballots
 - Ballots cast for a fictional character
 - Ballots cast for an ineligible candidate
 - Two or more marked ballots folded together (together they count as only one illegal vote)

If a marked ballot is folded together with a blank ballot, the marked ballot counts as one legal vote, and the blank ballot is considered scrap paper.

Each question on a multipart ballot is counted as a separate ballot. If a member leaves one part blank, the votes entered on the other questions still count.

If a member votes for more choices than positions to be elected, the vote is considered illegal.

If a member votes for fewer choices than positions to be elected, the vote is legal and those votes count.

Small technical errors, such as spelling mistakes or marking an X when a checkmark is called for, don't make a vote illegal as long as the voter's intent is discernible.

Votes cast by illegal voters must not be counted at all, not even included in the number of total votes cast. If it's determined that enough illegal votes were cast by illegal voters to affect the result, and these votes can't be identified and removed from the count, then the vote is deemed null and must be retaken.

After the vote

After the votes are counted, the chairman of the tellers reads aloud to the membership the complete report of the vote counts but doesn't declare the result. That job belongs to the presiding officer, who reads the report again to the members, concluding with a formal declaration of the result. For example, she may say, ". . . and Mr. Turkey is declared elected as the Birdbrain of the Year." The entire tellers' report should be included in the minutes of the meeting.

When determining how long to hold the ballots before destroying them, your main consideration is the possibility of needing a recount. After the period during which a recount can be conducted has passed, you don't need to keep the ballots. A decision on how long to keep them can be made at the meeting when the vote takes place, or a short retention period for ballots can be adopted as a standing rule.