

# THE VOTING PROCESS



**Elections BC** is an independent and non-partisan Office of the Legislature responsible for administering electoral processes in British Columbia, including provincial general elections and by-elections, recall petitions, initiative petitions and initiative votes, the conduct of referenda and plebiscites, and campaign financing and advertising rules for local elections and assent voting. Elections BC is not responsible for administering federal elections or local elections. By doing so in a fair and impartial way, Elections BC makes sure that British Columbians have full access to their democratic rights.

British Columbia was the first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt **fixed-date elections**. The *Constitution Act* calls for provincial general elections to take place on the third Saturday in October every four years.

Regardless of fixed-date election legislation, a provincial election can be held at any time if the government loses the confidence of the legislature or if the lieutenant governor were to dissolve the legislature on the advice of the premier. As a result of an early election call, the 42nd British Columbia general election will take place on Saturday, October 24, 2020.

You are eligible to vote in a British Columbia provincial election if:

- You are a Canadian citizen;
- You are at least 18 years of age on voting day; and
- You have been a resident of British Columbia for at least six months prior to voting day.

The *Election Act* also requires that voters prove their identity and residential address in order to receive a ballot or register to vote. You have three options:

1. One document issued by the Government of B.C. or Canada that contains the voter's name, photograph and residential address, such as a B.C. driver's license or B.C. Identification Card (BCID).
2. A Certificate of Indian Status.
3. Two documents that contain the voter's name (at least one of the documents must also contain the voter's residential address).

Elections BC maintains a **voters list**, which includes the name and address of registered eligible voters. Before an election is called, you can register to vote using Elections BC's online registration system or by contacting their office. During an election, you can also register as a voter at the voting place prior to casting your ballot.

## LESSON 7: THE VOTING PROCESS

As part of recent changes to the *Election Act*, eligible 16 and 17 year olds in British Columbia can now register to be part of the List of Future Voters. Once they turn 18, registrants will be automatically added to the Provincial Voters List.

To be eligible for the List of Future Voters, an individual must be:

- 16 or 17 years old,
- a Canadian citizen, and
- a resident of B.C.

Each **electoral district** is divided into smaller **voting areas**, which are defined geographic areas. Eligible voters can vote at the **voting place** designated for their voting area or at any other voting place in the province. Voting places will be available on the Elections BC website ([www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca)), published in community newspapers and included on 'Where to Vote' cards sent to all registered voters.

Voters may choose to vote in one of four ways:

**At advance voting** — Advance voting locations are open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (local time) from Thursday, October 15 to Wednesday, October 21.

**On General Voting Day** — General voting places are open on October 24 from 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Pacific time.

**At any district electoral office** — From when an election is called to 4 p.m. on October 24.

**Vote by mail** — Voters can ask for a vote by mail package from before an election is called until 4 p.m. on General Voting Day. The package will be mailed to you or you can pick it up at a district electoral office. The completed package must be returned to Elections BC by 8 p.m. on October 24.

Voting in government elections is done by **secret ballot**. This ensures the privacy of each voter's preference. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

A **ballot** lists the names of the candidates running in your electoral district and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be **accepted** (e.g., checkmark, X, shading in).

The voting process at a voting place works as follows:

1. Once you confirm your eligibility, you are given a ballot initialed by the election official.
2. Go behind a voting screen to mark your ballot. Choose only one candidate on the ballot.

3. Hand your folded ballot back to the voting officer to check for the initials and remove the counterfoil.
4. Place your folded ballot in the ballot box.

A **rejected ballot** is a ballot that cannot be counted because the voter's intention cannot be interpreted from the mark on the ballot. This can include marking the ballot for more than one candidate (even if different symbols are used), ranking the candidates, leaving the ballot blank or identifying who the voter is.

A **spoiled ballot** is a ballot that is torn or marked mistakenly and exchanged for a new ballot. It is kept separate and not placed in the ballot box.

When preparing to vote, you can consider reasons to support a candidate for MLA, a political party or leader, a specific policy idea or a whole party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time.

You will know you are ready to vote when you feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

### BIG IDEA

Elections are the process where citizens have the greatest influence on their government and legislation.

### LEARNING INTENTIONS

Upon completion of the lesson, students are expected to know the following:

- Election processes and the electoral system in B.C.;
- The eligibility criteria for voting in provincial elections; and
- The different ways that voters can choose to cast their ballot.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Understand how to participate in the voting process;
- Engage in constructive and critical dialogue; and
- Demonstrate critical thinking and decision-making skills.

### RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 7: The Voting Process
- Video: Why Voting Matters
- Video: The Voting Process in British Columbia
- Video: Why Voting Matters
- Activity Sheet 7.1: Preparing to Vote
- Activity Sheet 7.2: How to Vote
- Student Vote Election Manual

(Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at [www.studentvote.ca/bc](http://www.studentvote.ca/bc))

## LESSON 7: THE VOTING PROCESS

### ACTIVITIES

#### Hook: 10-15 min

1. Demonstrate the process of filling out a ballot by holding a mock vote with your class. Create a simple ballot for the class with a fun question and three to four options for responses (e.g., favourite sport, holiday, food, movie, TV show or musician/band).

2. Show students what a ballot looks like and how to fill it out correctly. Students can use a checkmark, X or use any other mark as long as it clearly indicates their choice. Remind students that they can only vote for one option, otherwise it will not count.

*Teacher Note: Review the ballot terms 'accepted', 'rejected' and 'spoiled'. Refer to the Student Vote Election Manual for ballot examples.*

3. Distribute the ballots and invite each student to go behind the voting screen to mark their choice. Afterwards ask them to re-fold their ballot to ensure privacy and place it in the ballot box.

4. Count the ballots and share the results of the vote.

#### Essential Concepts: 20 min

1. Use Slide Deck 8 and the 'The Voting Process in British Columbia' video to review the key terms and concepts regarding the voting process for British Columbia provincial elections: Elections BC, elector, ballot, secret ballot, accepted ballot, rejected ballot, spoiled ballot, advance voting, special voting opportunity.

2. Watch the 'Why Voting Matters' video and listen to young people talk about why they think voting is important. Afterwards, ask students to share their opinions about voting.

#### Discussion: 5-10 min

Discuss the importance of voting by secret ballot in elections and the effort to preserve individual choice and fair elections. What sort of consequences could develop if elections were held publicly or voters' choices were known? What does voting in private ensure? Why is it important to ensure a fair electoral process?

#### Action: 20 min and homework

1. Review the list of candidates (and their parties) that students are able to vote for in the election.

2. Using Activity Sheet 7.1, have students reflect on the campaign issues, parties, leaders and local candidates.

3. Take up Activity Sheet 7.1 as a class and provide students the opportunity to share their views. Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and even try to convince others to adopt their choices, while others may prefer to keep their politics personal. Remind students that opinions should be respected.

4. Encourage students to take their activity sheets home and start discussions with their families and friends. Have students ask their parents or guardians if they plan to vote and whether they have chosen a candidate to support. Suggest to students that they visit the Elections BC website ([www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca)) to find out where and when their parents/guardians can vote.

#### Extensions:

A. Using Activity Sheet 7.2, have students illustrate the steps to voting at the voting place. Watching the 'Organizing Student Vote Day' video may be helpful. Encourage students to share their activity sheet with their family.

B. Create a 'pledge to vote' activity for all Student Vote participants. This could include a ceremony or an official 'I am a Voter' agreement, in which students pledge to join the List of Future Voters when they turn 16, vote when they turn 18 and/or agree to be a lifelong voter.

C. Give students a chance to share their election scrapbooks from the campaign. Each student could choose two of their favourite entries to share with the class.

#### Reflection: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about voting and making your decision. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- What research or activity has helped you make your decision? Is there more research you would like to do?
- Do you feel that you know more about the election than your parents?
- Why is voting important?
- Should young people be allowed to vote?

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Student Vote Election Manual
- Elections BC — [www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca)