

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 8: 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), 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 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:

- The voting process in British Columbia;
- 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.

LESSON 8: THE VOTING PROCESS

RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 8: The Voting Process
 - Video: Student Vote BC 2017
 - Video: The Voting Process in British Columbia
 - Video: Why Voting Matters
 - Activity Sheet 8.1: Preparing to Vote
 - Student Vote Election Manual
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at www.studentvote.ca/bc)

ACTIVITIES

Hook: 10-15 min

1. Watch the 'Student Vote BC 2017' and 'Why Voting Matters' videos with your class to prepare for Student Vote Day.
2. Explain to students that the purpose of the Student Vote program is to give students a chance to practice voting so that they will be more prepared to vote in the future. The Student Vote results are also released publicly and shared with the media, which allows young people to have a voice in the election and for parties to reflect on the views of the next generation of voters.
3. Facilitate a class discussion: What skills do you practice (e.g., sports, driving, video games, cooking)? Is it important for students to practice voting? Why or why not? Why should young people have the opportunity to share their views and opinions?

Discussion: 5 min

Voting in elections is done by secret ballot. What does this mean? Why is this important? What sort of consequences could develop if elections were held publicly? Why is it important to ensure a fair and impartial electoral process?

Essential Concepts: 10-15 min

Use Slide Deck 8 and '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.

★ Action: 20 min and homework

1. Remind students that voting is more than just marking an 'X' on a ballot. It requires research, critical-thinking, reflection and decision-making. Using Activity Sheet 8.1, have students evaluate the campaign issues, party platforms, party leaders and local candidates.
2. Afterwards, facilitate a class discussion and allow students the opportunity to share their views of the candidates and the campaign. Some individuals may jump at the chance to share their opinions and even try to persuade others to adopt their choices. Others may opt for silence and prefer to keep their politics personal.

Teacher Note: This is a great opportunity to reinforce the choice for privacy and the importance of being respectful to others who hold diverse points of view.

3. Encourage students to take their activity sheets home and start discussions with their families and friends about the election. Have students ask their parents or guardians if they plan to vote and whether they have chosen a candidate to support. Remind students that they can visit the Elections BC website (www.elections.bc.ca) to find where and when their parents/guardians can vote, and encourage them to accompany voters they know to the voting place to observe the process.

✚ Extensions:

- A. Have students practice 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). Show students what a ballot looks like and how to fill it out correctly. Distribute the ballots and invite each student to go behind the voting screen to mark their choice. Count the ballots and review the terms 'accepted' and 'rejected.' Share the results of the vote.
- B. In groups or individually, have students design a campaign poster, slide deck or speech to encourage people to cast a ballot in the provincial election. Students should use images and words to describe why it is important to vote. Afterwards, display the posters around the school or ask students to share their work with their family and friends.

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C. Online voting has been suggested as a way to improve voter turnout. What are potential advantages and disadvantages of online voting? Is it more or less convenient? Is it more or less expensive? Is voter coercion a risk or not? Would the system be more or less secure? Have a class discussion or ask students to write an opinion piece about online voting.

D. 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. This will ensure they receive important information from Elections BC about where, when and how to vote when a provincial election is called. Review the process for getting on the List of Future Voters at Elections BC (<https://elections.bc.ca/voting/voters-list/future-voters/>) and consider making it a class activity.

E. Ask students to make predictions about the election results in the Student Vote and/or general election (e.g., seat count, popular vote percentage). Collect the predictions and reveal the student who is closest to the actual outcome after the election.



Reflection: 10 min

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

- Why is it important to have free and fair elections?
- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- Have class activities, campaign events, dialogue with family and friends or media coverage had any impact on your decision to vote for a particular party or candidate? Reflect on what has shaped your decision.
- What moment or event in the election campaign has attracted the most attention from the media? Why do you think this is the case?
- Why do you think it is important to vote?

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Student Vote Election Manual
- Elections BC — www.elections.bc.ca