
ELECTION SEASON TOOLKIT

Your First Vote

Everything that feels unfamiliar the first time, laid out so it isn't. No question here is too basic.

01 Are You Eligible and Registered?

- ✓ You're a U.S. citizen and will be 18 by Election Day. That's the bar.
- ✓ Register by your state's deadline. Some states allow same-day registration.
- ✓ Make sure you're registered at your current address, especially if you've moved for school.
- ✓ Many states let you pre-register at 16 or 17, so your registration is ready the moment you turn 18.
- ✓ Party registration, if your state has it, does not lock in who you vote for in the general election. Primaries are different, since many states only let registered party members vote in their party's primary.

02 Before Election Day: Get Oriented

- ✓ Look up your polling place and plan how you'll get there.
- ✓ Decide how you'll vote: in person on Election Day, early voting, or by mail.
- ✓ Check whether your state requires ID to vote — rules vary widely. Look up your state's requirements in the US Vote Foundation's [state-by-state guide](#).
- ✓ Research your candidates and what's on the ballot ahead of time. Walking in with a plan beats deciding in line.
- ✓ Ask someone who's voted before if you have questions. There's no wrong question here.
- ✓ You don't need to have an opinion on every single thing on the ballot before you vote.

03 What Actually Happens at the Polls

- ✓ You check in with a poll worker, who confirms your registration and may ask for ID.
- ✓ You're handed a ballot or directed to a voting machine.
- ✓ Bringing notes or your sample ballot to reference is completely normal.
- ✓ You mark your choices privately. No one sees who or what you vote for.
- ✓ You submit or scan your ballot, and that's it. You're a voter now.

04 Voting Vocabulary, Decoded

- ✓ Precinct. The specific voting district tied to your address.
- ✓ Ballot measure. A law or policy voters decide directly, not a candidate race.
- ✓ Down-ballot. The local and lesser-known races below the big national ones.

- ✓ Provisional ballot. A backup ballot used when there's a question about your registration, counted once it's resolved.
- ✓ Poll worker. The trained, local person running your polling place. Always okay to ask them for help.

05 It's Okay To...

- ✓ Skip a race or ballot measure you don't have an opinion on. An incomplete ballot still counts.
- ✓ Take your time in the booth. Nobody is rushing you.
- ✓ Ask a poll worker for help. That's literally what they're there for.

06 After You Vote

- ✓ Grab an “I Voted” sticker if they're offered. Small tradition, still worth it.
- ✓ If you voted by mail, confirm your ballot was received and counted.
- ✓ Talk to friends about voting. Normalizing it makes it easier for the next first-timer.
- ✓ Mark your calendar for the next election. Voting is a habit, not a one-time thing.

First time voting and not sure about something?

866-OUR-VOTE

Trained, nonpartisan volunteers can walk you through registration, what to bring, and what to expect. No question is too basic, and you can call before Election Day or while you're in line.

Additional resources: [US Vote Foundation](#) (state-by-state ID and voting rules) · [CanIVote.org](#) (run by the National Association of Secretaries of State — registration, deadlines, and polling places by state)

Rules on registration, ID, and deadlines vary by state. Always confirm specifics with your state or county election office before Election Day.

New voter. Equal vote.