

# Ballot Design Checklist

In designing your ballot, ensure that it satisfies the following guidelines:

## **Ballot instructions should be brief, simple, and clear.**

Paper ballots:

- Display general instructions in the top left-hand corner of the ballot. Place specific instructions and related actions together. Do not put all instructions at the beginning of the ballot.
- Let voters know that if they make a mistake, they can get a new ballot. Include this information in the initial instructions.

Electronic ballots:

- Display startup instructions in an easy-to-spot location in the voting booth.
- Place specific instructions and related actions together. Do not put all instructions at the beginning of the ballot.
- Instruct voters to review their selections and provide clear instructions on how to change a selection and cast the ballot.

All ballots:

- In instructions for write-in votes, state plainly that voters should not vote for both a named candidate and a write-in a candidate for the same office.
- Write instructions in an active voice and in positive terms. (“Fill in the oval for your write-in vote to count,” rather than, “If the oval is not marked, your vote cannot be counted for the write-in candidate.”)
- Use common, easily understood words. (“Move to the next page of the ballot,” or “Move to the next screen,” rather than “Navigate forward through the ballot.”)
- Provide the context of the action first, then the action. (“[Context] To vote for the candidate of your choice, [Action] fill the oval to the left of the candidate’s name.”)
- Place each instruction on its own line.

**Don't split contests.**

- List all candidates for the same race on the same page and in the same column.
- Remove the entire column or row for any candidate or party that has been withdrawn or disqualified (not just the candidate or party name).

**Make sure ballot design is consistent.**

- Use consistent format and style for every contest and voting action.
- Use consistent font type, letter-size, and shading for all contests.
- Place response options (such as fill-in ovals) in a consistent place on the ballot, such as one side of candidate names or ballot question choices.

**Make ballots easy to understand visually.**

Paper ballots:

- Use the fill-the-oval, rather than the connect-the-arrow, method of selecting a choice in a contest.

Electronic ballots:

- Try to place only one contest on each screen, at least for federal and statewide races.

All ballots:

- Use flush-left text, instead of centered text.
- Display all text in mixed case, rather than all capital letters.
- Use a simple and easy-to-read font, such as Arial or Univers.
- Bold and/or shade certain text, such as office names.
- Use a legible, minimum text size, meeting VVSG requirements, such as 12 points.
- Eliminate extraneous information (e.g., candidate's hometown, occupation, etc.), or design it to avoid visual clutter.

**Give voters maximum flexibility.**

Electronic ballots:

- Allow voters to select or change the language of the ballot at any time during the voting process.
- Allow voters to change text size and contrast levels and to get audio support at any time during the voting process.