



Center for  
Civic Design

# Best Practices Designing Ranked Choice Voting Ballots

Guidelines for Ranked Choice Voting ballot layout and design.

Updated July 2022

[hello@civicdesign.org](mailto:hello@civicdesign.org)

[civicdesign.org](https://civicdesign.org)

[@civicdesign](https://twitter.com/civicdesign)

# Introduction

At CCD, we know that good ballot design and effective voter education make informed and confident voters. It can be a challenge to fit everything on a ballot, especially on mixed contest ballots with multiple languages and many candidates. But, good design will help you fit everything you need to and support both novice and advanced RCV voters.

For us at CCD, a successful RCV vote means that:

- Voters understand how to mark the ballot to express their intent.
- Voters make their own decision about ranking.
- Voters feel confident that their voice will be heard.

## Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for anyone designing a RCV or mixed contest ballot.

## Why follow these guidelines?

Poorly designed ballots lead to:

- Voters not voting in a way that reflects their intent.
- Higher over and undervote rates.
- Voter confusion.

## What's included in these best practices?

- RCV ballot layout styles.
- How to divide contests on a mixed contest ballot.
- What to include in RCV ballot instructions.

## What are these guidelines based on?

- Our research on what works for voters. (See [Page 24](#) for more details)
- The experience of elections offices and other groups in their successful campaigns.

# Best Practices

## Designing Ranked Choice Voting Ballots

**First, you'll need to choose a RCV ballot style** that works for you, your election system, and your voters.

No matter what style of RCV ballot you're designing:

- **Follow the EAC's best practices for ballot designs.** Best practice design helps voters focus on their intent, not the mechanics of marking the ballot. [Page 12](#)
- **Write clear, short instructions.** Write those instructions in plain language to make ranking understandable. [Page 13](#)
- **Include visual instructions.** Use illustrations that show how to correctly and incorrectly fill out a RCV ballot. [Page 14](#)
- **Put instructions where voters need them.** Include instructions at the top of the ballot and within each contest. Provide full instructions in supplementary materials. On Ballot Marking Devices, tell voters how many ranks they have left and include a review screen with undervote alerts. [Page 15](#)
- **Arrange multilingual ballots to support bilingual readers.** Lay out multilingual material with languages side-by-side (vertically or horizontally). [Page 19](#)
- **Clearly separate RCV and non-RCV contests.** Ballot layout is often constrained by the legal order of contests. Depending on your state's restrictions use a page turn, clear headers, and/or instructions to divide contest types. [Page 20](#)

[Read more about our research and best practices for Ranked Choice Voting at \*\*civicdesign.org\*\*](#)

# Ballot Styles

In our research we have tested several styles of RCV ballot. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

You'll need to choose a RCV ballot style that works for you, your election system, and your voters. You know your jurisdiction best!

These best practices include the following RCV ballot layouts:

- Grid [Page 5](#)
- Adapted optical scan [Page 7](#)
- UOCAVA Combined for overseas voters [Page 8](#)
- Hand-ranked [Page 10](#)
- Accessible [Page 11](#)

**Key questions to ask yourself** when picking a RCV ballot style are:

- Is ranking new for your voters?
- How many contests will include ranking? Where are those contests in the overall ballot order?
- What are your legal requirements for ballot design, especially requirements for the number of choices ranking?
- Does your voting system support RCV ballot layout?

# RCV Ballot Style

## Grid — up to 5 ranks

Ranks are in columns and each candidate is a row. This ballot style is the most common accommodates different numbers of rankings within the limit of paper width.

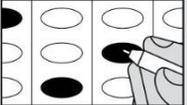
Up to 5 ranks is a good number of ranks to use so that you can fit two contests side by side. Any more ranks than that make it difficult to fit two contests beside each other with large enough text..



**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
 County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

**1/1**

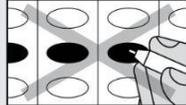
**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**



**Rank candidates in the order of your choice.**  
Use the ovals in the columns marked choice 1, 2, 3, and so on.



**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval in a column. You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.



**Wrong:** Mark only 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your 1st-choice candidate.

Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

Mayor	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Charlene Franz</b> Federalist Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Gerard Harris</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Linda Bargmann</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Barbara Adcock</b> Constitution Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Carrie Steel-Loy</b> Independent	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Frederick Sharp</b> Labor Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Write-in</b>	<input type="radio"/>				

City Council	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Frederick Sharp</b> Whig Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Luis Garcia</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Charles Layne</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Andrew Kowalski</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Jelani Bongani</b> Independent	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Eric Savoy</b> Independent	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Write-in</b>	<input type="radio"/>				

**Ballot Design Tip!**  
Make sure that you're lining up all marking targets along timing marks.

With up to 5 rankings, many ballots can fit contests side-by-side.

Center bubbles in the space, vertically and horizontally, to help voters stay on the right row/column.

Light horizontal lines make rows clear.

Numerals read from left-to-right. Using just the number is okay, especially on a multilingual ballot.

# RCV Ballot Style

## Grid — up to N ranks

It is possible to rank more than 5 candidates, but the challenge is that they take up more space. To create a well designed ballot with more than 5 ranks, you will only be able to fit 1 column of contests.

You will only use as many ranks as candidates, so rank-10 will have wide variation in different contests!



**Official Ballot**  
Franklin County, California    General Election    Tuesday, November 6, 2012

**2/2**

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

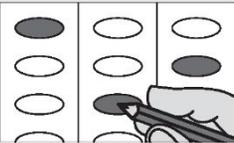
**Making selections**

Rank candidates in the order of your choice.

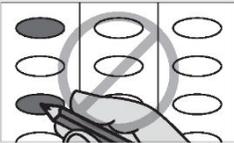
You may rank as many or as few candidates as you wish.

**Fill in the oval...**

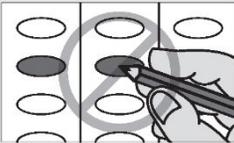
- In the 1st column for your first 1st choice.
- In the 2nd column for your 2nd choice.
- In the 3rd column for your 3rd choice, and so on



Fill in the oval completely.



No more than 1 oval in a column.



No more than 1 oval for a candidate.

<b>Mayor</b>										
Rank up to 10 candidates. Mark no more than 1 oval in each column.	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Sixth choice	Seventh choice	Eighth choice	Ninth choice	Tenth choice
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
<b>Frederick Sharp</b> Orange Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Luis Garcia</b> Orange Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Charles Layne</b> Yellow Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Andrew Kowalski</b> Yellow Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Alex Wallace</b> Purple Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Eric Savoy</b> Purple Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Barbara Williams</b> Tan Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Lillian Cohen</b> Lime Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Ann Windsock</b> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Markos Miller</b> Silver Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									
<b>Elizabeth Harp</b> Silver Party	<input type="checkbox"/>									

# RCV Ballot Style

## Adapted Optical Scan

If you can't use the grid style, this is for you! Each rank is laid out like a separate contest.

This ballot style works well with all tabulators, include those that don't have a RCV module. It can be a transition between formats.

### Ballot Design Tip!

This example shows rank-3, but rank-6 is also possible by using two rows for each contest.

This layout is a minimal change from a normal ballot layout. There is a rank in each of the three columns, and one contest per row.

Make sure that you clearly separate contests with a heavy rule and/or color bar with contest name.



**Official Ballot**  
Franklin County, California    General Election    Tuesday, November 6, 2012

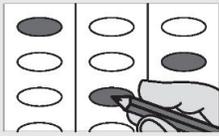
2/2

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

1. Pick your 1st choice candidate and completely fill in the oval next to that candidate under First Choice.
2. If you have a 2nd choice candidate, fill in the oval next to that candidate under Second Choice.
3. Mark your 3rd choice candidate, if you have one, the same way under Third Choice.

**!** Mark **at least one candidate** for your vote to count.

**!** If you make a mistake ask for a new ballot. Otherwise your vote may not count.



**!** All three choices must be different from each other.

**!** Don't mark more than one in each column.

**Mayor**

1 First Choice Fill in one oval	2 Second Choice Fill in one oval	3 Third Choice Fill in one oval
<input type="radio"/> Frederick Sharp Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Frederick Sharp Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Frederick Sharp Orange Party
<input type="radio"/> Luis Garcia Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Luis Garcia Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Luis Garcia Orange Party
<input type="radio"/> Alex Wallace Purple Party	<input type="radio"/> Alex Wallace Purple Party	<input type="radio"/> Alex Wallace Purple Party
<input type="radio"/> Eric Savoy Purple Party	<input type="radio"/> Eric Savoy Purple Party	<input type="radio"/> Eric Savoy Purple Party
<input type="radio"/> Barbara Williams Tan Party	<input type="radio"/> Barbara Williams Tan Party	<input type="radio"/> Barbara Williams Tan Party
<input type="radio"/> Lillian Cohen Lime Party	<input type="radio"/> Lillian Cohen Lime Party	<input type="radio"/> Lillian Cohen Lime Party
<input type="radio"/> Ann Windsock Independent	<input type="radio"/> Ann Windsock Independent	<input type="radio"/> Ann Windsock Independent
<input type="radio"/> Markos Miller Silver Party	<input type="radio"/> Markos Miller Silver Party	<input type="radio"/> Markos Miller Silver Party

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**U.S. Representative**

1 First Choice Fill in one oval	2 First Choice Fill in one oval	3 First Choice Fill in one oval
<input type="radio"/> Valarie Altman Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Valarie Altman Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Valarie Altman Orange Party
<input type="radio"/> George Hovis Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/> George Hovis Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/> George Hovis Yellow Party
<input type="radio"/> Althea Sharp Purple Party	<input type="radio"/> Althea Sharp Purple Party	<input type="radio"/> Althea Sharp Purple Party
<input type="radio"/> Mary Tawa Lime Party	<input type="radio"/> Mary Tawa Lime Party	<input type="radio"/> Mary Tawa Lime Party
<input type="radio"/> Joe Li Tan Party	<input type="radio"/> Joe Li Tan Party	<input type="radio"/> Joe Li Tan Party
<input type="radio"/> Phil Wilkie Independent	<input type="radio"/> Phil Wilkie Independent	<input type="radio"/> Phil Wilkie Independent

Thank you for voting!  
Please turn in  
your finished ballot

# RCV Ballot Style

## Election and Runoff combined

When there is a runoff election, there is often not enough time for overseas voters to receive and return their ballots. Some states use RCV so UOCAVA voters can vote in both the general election and any possible runoff at the same time.

This version combines both steps. One research participant said “I like how it's broken down, the two steps close together. I like this one better because it's easier to read.”



**Primary & Special Absentee Runoff Ballot**  
 Fulton County, Georgia Primary and Runoff Election Tuesday, March 3, 2020

**1/1**

**Instructions for voting**

In the **first step**, you will vote as you normally would.  
 In the **second step**, you will vote in case Atlanta has a second election (this is called a runoff and is explained below).

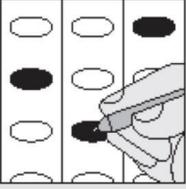
This ballot allows you to make a choice in case that second election occurs. Doing so means **you won't have to request another overseas ballot.**

**How to vote**

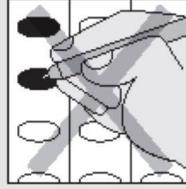
First, vote for the candidate you want to win.  
 Then, rank the candidates in order of your choice, in case a runoff occurs. **You may rank as many or as few candidates as you wish.**

**Fill in the oval...**

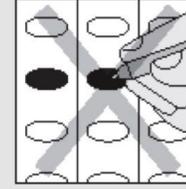
- In the 1st column for your first 1st choice.
- In the 2nd column for your 2nd choice.
- In the 3rd column for your 3rd choice.
- Continue until you have made all your choices.



Fill in the oval completely.



No more than 1 oval in a column.



No more than 1 oval for a candidate.

**President**

**Step 1: Vote for your choice** in this election (or in the primary election)  
 Mark no more than 1 oval in each column.

**Step 2: Rank your additional choices in case there is a runoff**

In Georgia, a candidate has to win a 50% majority of votes to win. If no candidate reaches that percentage, Georgia holds another election called a **runoff**. In this case, the runoff is between the two top vote-getters in the first election.

Below, you have the chance to rank who you would vote for if a runoff occurs.

First choice		Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Sixth choice
1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	
<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="radio"/>						
<input type="radio"/>						

Explain that the ballot includes 2 elections.

Explains that the design of these ballots helps UOCAVA voters save time and effort.

Instructions that explain how to correctly mark a RCV ballot.

A plain language definition of what a runoff is.

Thick vertical rule clearly divides the first choice and additional rankings in case of a runoff.

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# RCV Ballot Style

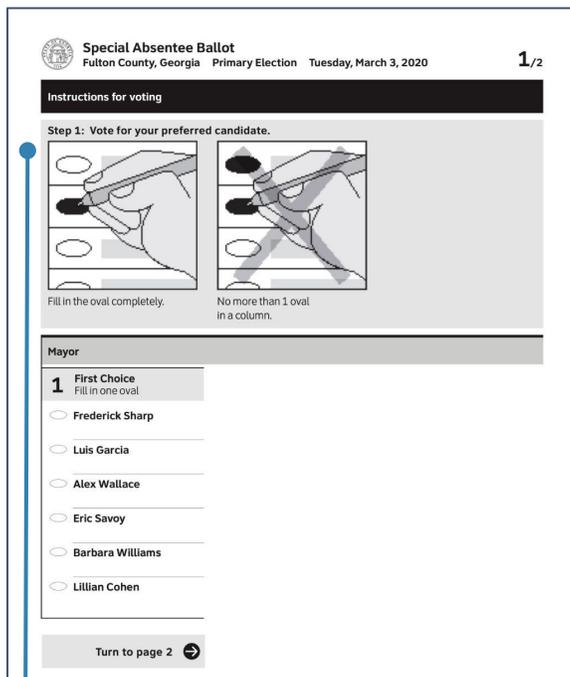
## Election and Runoff as separate ballots

This version puts the two steps on different sides of the ballot or on different ballot papers.

Both Election and Runoff worked well in testing. [Read more about our UOCAVA RCV research at civicdesign.org/projects/rcv](https://civicdesign.org/projects/rcv)

### Step 1

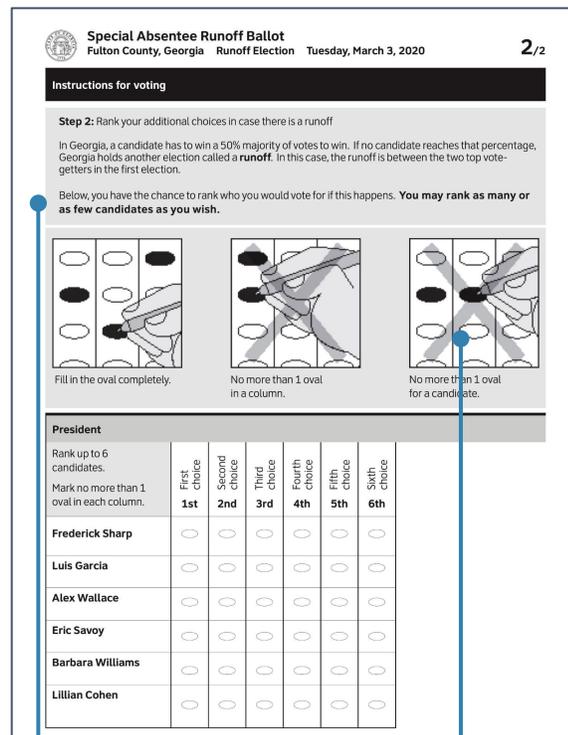
Voters mark a single choice for the general election.



Each ballot is shown as a separate step

### Step 2

Voters rank candidates to be used in case of a runoff. The challenge is that voters must vote for their 1st choice again.



A plain language definition of what a runoff is.

Instructions that explain how to correctly rank candidates

# RCV Ballot Style

## Hand-ranked

Voters enter the ranking numbers by hand.

This style is easy to explain and allows for a three column ballot, but has challenges for implementation.

- Voters in our research had difficulty ranking long contests.
- It requires optical character recognition or hand counting.

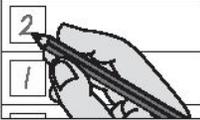
 **Official Ballot**  
Franklin County, California General Election Tuesday, November 6, 2012 2/2

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

**Making selections**  
Rank candidates in the order of your choice.  
You may rank as many or as few candidates as you wish.

**In the box next to the candidate**

- Write 1 for your 1st choice
- Write 2 for your 2nd choice
- Write 3 for your 3rd choice, and so on



**!** Give each candidate you rank a different number.

Mayor	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Frederick Sharp</b> Orange Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Luis Garcia</b> Orange Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Charles Layne</b> Yellow Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Andrew Kowalski</b> Yellow Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Alex Wallace</b> Purple Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Eric Savoy</b> Purple Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Barbara Williams</b> Tan Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Lillian Cohen</b> Lime Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Ann Windsock</b> Independent
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Markos Miller</b> Silver Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Elizabeth Harp</b> Silver Party
City Council	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Valerie Altman</b> Orange Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>George Hovis</b> Yellow Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Althea Sharp</b> Purple Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Mary Tawa</b> Lime Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Joe Li</b> Tan Party
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phil Wilkie</b> Independent

**Remember to vote both sides of the ballot** 

Voters write in numbers to rank. The instructions say to “Give each candidate you rank a different number.”

# RCV Ballot Style

## Accessible RCV on Ballot Marking Devices

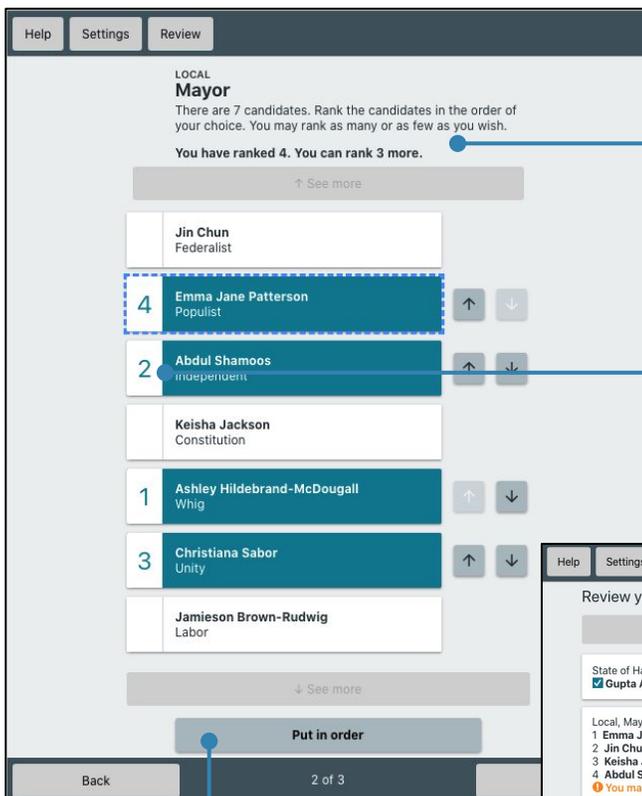
Navigation and ranking interactions are designed for to work with a wide range of voters' abilities while remaining efficient. Voters select candidates in the order they want to rank them.

**Audio script** combines on-screen text with status information and instructions.

**Pauses** separate chunks of text providing "space" for the voter to interrupt the audio.

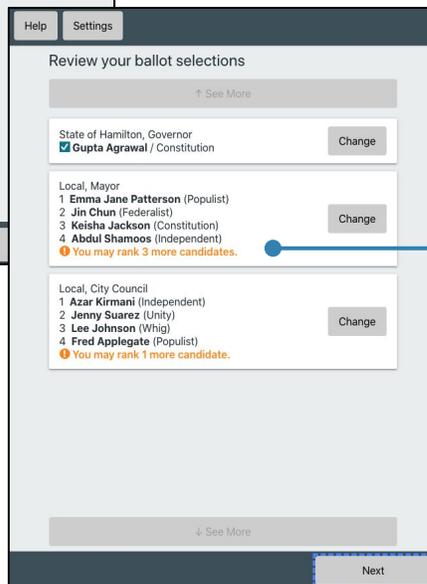
**Up/Down** key moves around the screen to every screen element.

**Select** key activates the button currently in focus (blue dotted box), and completes the action the button represents.



Ranking progress is shown as a prompt and visually in the list of candidates.

When a candidate is selected, rank number changes but candidate order doesn't, so voters don't lose where they are in the candidate list.



**Review screen** shows list of selections and how many candidates are not ranked.

A **Put in Order** button reorders candidates by rank order at any time.

# Follow the EAC's best practices for ballot designs.

## Best practice design helped voters understand, so they can focus on their intent.

Clear design makes a ballot easier for voters to fill out as they intend.

Learn more:

- [EAC's Designing Polling Place Materials](#)
- [Field Guide Vol 1 Designing Usable Ballots](#)

**Official Ballot**  
Franklin County, California    General Election    Tuesday, November 6, 2012    1/2

**Instructions**  
Making selections

Fill in the oval to the left of the name of your choice. You must blacken the oval completely, and do not make any marks outside of the oval. You do not have to vote in every race.

**!** Do not cross out or erase, or your vote may not count. If you make a mistake or a stray mark, ask for a new ballot from the poll workers.

**Optional write-in**  
or write-in:  
Ann L

To add a candidate, fill in the oval to the left of "or write-in" and print the name clearly on the

US Senator	County Commissioners
<b>Vote for 1</b>	<b>Vote for 4</b>
<input type="radio"/> Victor Martinez Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Harvey Smith Orange Party
<input type="radio"/> David Platt Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/> Randall Eagle Orange Party
<input type="radio"/> Heather Portier Tan Party	<input type="radio"/> Reid Davis Yellow Party
<input type="radio"/> or write-in	<input type="radio"/> Barbara Shry Yellow Party
<b>US Representative</b>	<input type="radio"/> Carole Barker Tan Party
<b>Vote for 1</b>	<input type="radio"/> Hugh Feiser Tan Party
<input type="radio"/> Glen Tawner Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> Charles Qualey Lime Party
<input type="radio"/> Carroll Forrest Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/> Donald Rupp Silver Party
<input type="radio"/> or write-in	<input type="radio"/> write-in
<b>State Senator</b>	<input type="radio"/> write-in
<b>Vote for 1</b>	<input type="radio"/> write-in
<input type="radio"/> Andrea Solis Orange Party	<input type="radio"/> write-in
<input type="radio"/> Amos Keller Yellow Party	<input type="radio"/> write-in

**Ballot header** is visible, but not intrusive.

**Instructions where needed.** Short text with visual explanations. Nothing below the instructions if they are in the first column.

**Easy to read candidates.** Large enough text, white space, and separator lines.

**Contests headings.** Shaded headings and dark divider lines help separate contests

# Write clear, short instructions.

## Clear instructions help voters accurately mark their ballots.

Concise ballot instructions tell voters only what they absolutely need to know to vote. They will also help you save space on crowded ballots.

The below instructions come from many rounds of usability testing. Copy and use the full text of these instructions on [Page 22](#).

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

**Rank candidates in the order of your choice.**  
Use the ovals in the columns marked choice 1, 2, 3, and so on.

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval in a column. You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.

**Wrong:** Mark only 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your 1st-choice candidate.

Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

How to correctly rank candidates

Clearly distinguish incorrect ways of marking that will not be counted

What to do if you make a mistake

Concise header

Clear illustrations that match the ballot style

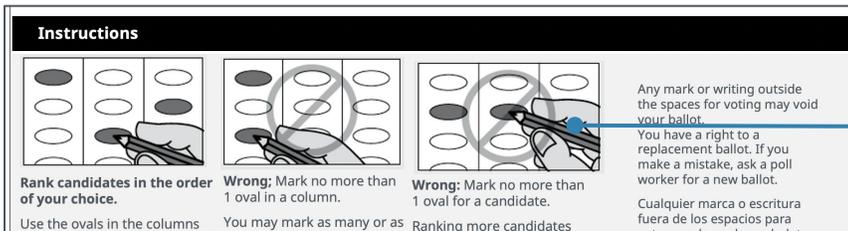
# Include visual instructions.

## Use illustrations that show how to correctly and incorrectly fill out a RCV ballot.

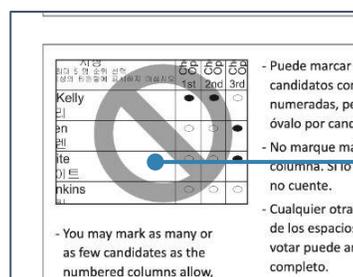
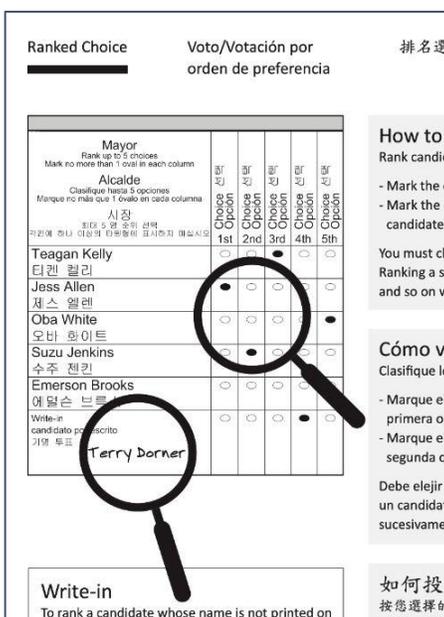
At a minimum, include an illustration of the correct way to mark the ranked choice contests on the ballot.

Clearly distinguish correct and incorrect ways of marking so that the correct way sticks out in voters minds'. To make the difference clear, use:

- **Scale.** Make the correct example larger than the incorrect example.
- **Symbols.** Slashed circles and Xs mean “Do not”. Check marks and open circles mean “Do”.
- **Color.** Make sure the colors you choose are accessible to colorblind voters.



Put illustrations next to their relevant instruction text. Don't duplicate illustrations on multilingual ballots.



On the NYC Privacy Sleeve, the incorrect examples are minimized because they are smaller and covered with a symbol.

# Put instructions where voters need them.

## Include instructions at the top of the ballot and within each contest.

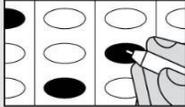
Ballot instructions also use a bite-snack-meal framework. Instruction “bites” and “meals” are included on the ballot.



**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
 County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

1/1

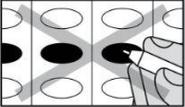
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**Wrong:** Mark only 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your 1st-choice candidate.

• mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

Mayor	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Charlene Franz</b> Federalist Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Gerard Harris</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Linda Bargmann</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Barbara Adcock</b> Constitution Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Carrie Steel-Loy</b> Independent	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Frederick Sharp</b> Labor Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Write-in</b>	<input type="radio"/>				

City Council	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Frederick Sharp</b> Whig Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Luis Garcia</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Charles Layne</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Andrew Kowalski</b> People's Party	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Jelani Bongani</b> Independent	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Eric Savoy</b> Independent	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>Write-in</b>	<input type="radio"/>				

The instructions “snack” goes at the top of the ballot page above or next to the first ranked choice voting contest.

The most important “bite” of an instruction goes inside the contest, including the correct number of ranking options.

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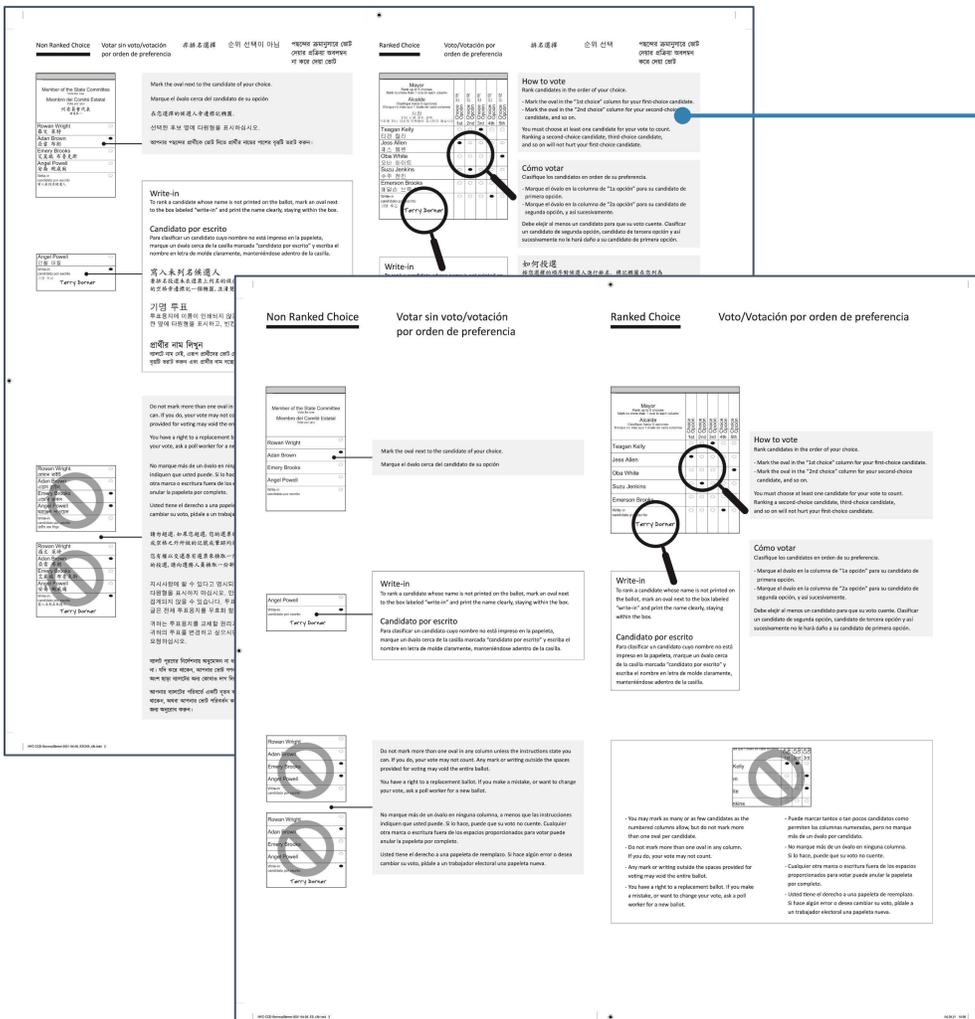
# Put instructions where voters need them.

## Provide full instructions on supplementary materials.

A full “meal” of ballot instructions can be included on:

- Ballot privacy sleeves
- Mail ballot inserts
- Poll signage

In the below example from NYC, an evergreen ballot privacy sleeve includes full instructions for non-RCV (on the left page) and RCV contests (on the right page). The privacy sleeve is about 20 x 20 inches unfolded.



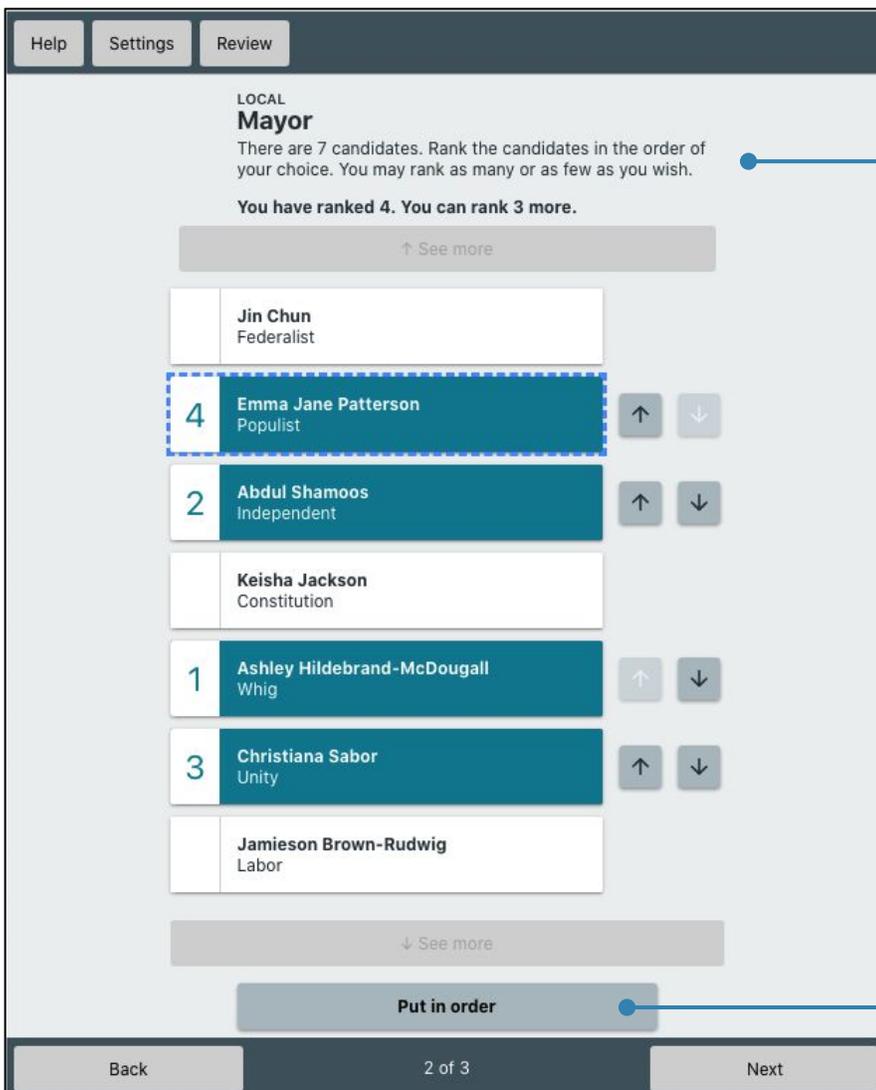
The ballot privacy sleeve fits detailed instructions in up to 5 languages.

Example from NYC (2021).

# Put instructions where voters need them.

## On Ballot Marking Devices, tell voters how many ranks they have left.

Ballot Marking Devices can prevent both under and overvotes by telling people how many rankings are left.



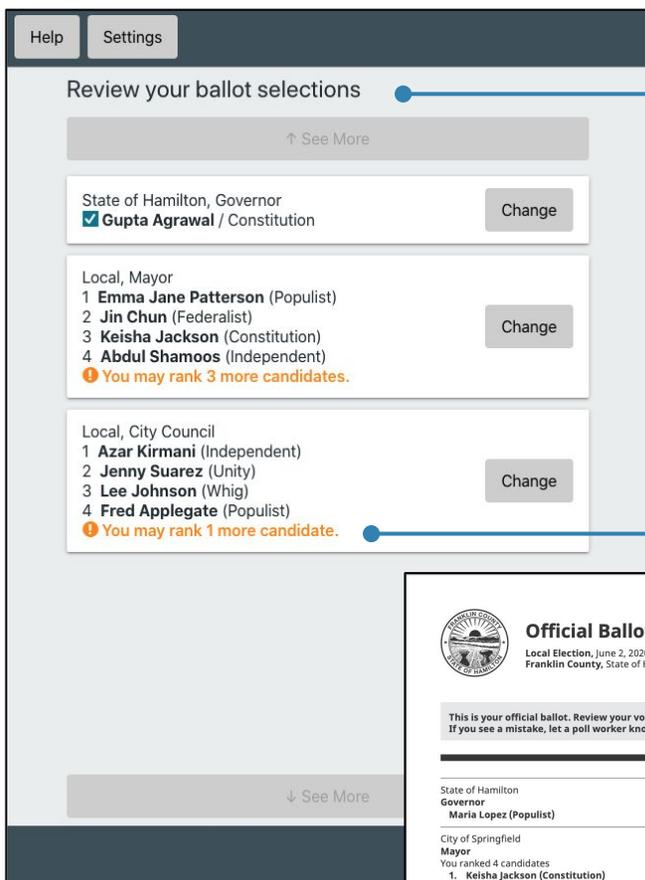
Bite-size instructions at the top of the screen include the total number of candidates and how many ranks remain.

Put in order button at the bottom of the screen re-orders the candidates by rank number.

# Put instructions where voters need them.

## On Ballot Marking Devices, include a review screen with undervote alerts.

BMD review screens are another opportunity to prevent undervotes in RCV elections. The review screen must easily allow voters to return and change their selections.

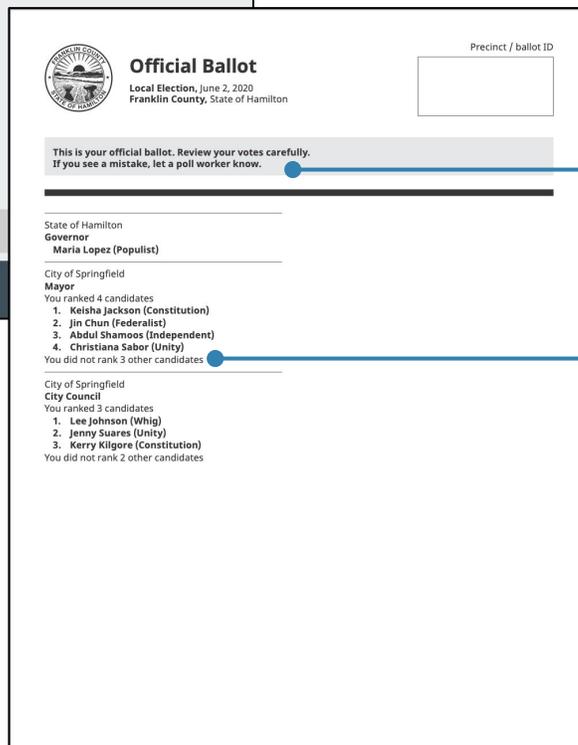


Bite size instruction at the top of the screen.

Exclamation point and bright color alert a voter that they can rank more candidates, if they want to.

Bite size instruction for what to do if the voter made a mistake.

Paper printout alerts a voter that they did not use all ranks.



# Arrange multilingual ballots to support bilingual readers.

## Lay out multilingual material with languages side-by-side (vertically or horizontally).

Each language should be visually distinct so that it is easy to compare the English version and translations.

Copy and paste our RCV instruction text written based on our research in English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese from [Page 22](#).

**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

**1/1**

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

**Rank candidates in the order of your choice.**  
Use the ovals in the columns marked 1, 2, 3, and so on.

**Clasifique a los candidatos en el orden de su elección.**  
Use los óvalos en las columnas marcadas como opción 1, 2, 3, y así sucesivamente.

**根据您的选择给候选人排名。**使用标有选择 1、2、3 等字样的竖列中的椭圆，以此类推。

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval in a column. You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.

**Incorrecto:** Marque solamente 1 óvalo en una columna. Puede marcar tantos candidatos como lo permitan las columnas.

**错误:** 一列中标记不超过 1 个椭圆。各列允许标记多少位候选人，您就可以标记多少位。

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your first-choice candidate.

**Incorrecto:** Marque solamente 1 óvalo para un candidato. Clasificar más candidatos no perjudicará a su candidato de primera elección.

**错误:** 为一位候选人标记不超过 1 个椭圆。为多个候选人排名不会影响您的首选候选人。

Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

Cualquier marca o escritura fuera de los espacios para votar puede anular su boleta.

Tiene derecho a una boleta de reemplazo. Si comete un error, pídale a un trabajador electoral una boleta nueva.

请勿在投票空间外写字或做任何标记，否则将导致您的选票作废。

您有权更换选票。如果不小心出错，请联系投票点工作人员索取新的选票。

Each language is a **row**.  
Each instruction is a **column**.

**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

**1/1**

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

**Rank candidates in the order of your choice.**  
Use the ovals in the columns marked 1, 2, 3, and so on.

**Clasifique a los candidatos en el orden de su elección.**  
Use los óvalos en las columnas marcadas como opción 1, 2, 3, y así sucesivamente.

**根据您的选择给候选人排名。**使用标有选择 1、2、3 等字样的竖列中的椭圆，以此类推。

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval in a column. You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.

**Incorrecto:** Marque solamente 1 óvalo en una columna. Puede marcar tantos candidatos como lo permitan las columnas.

**错误:** 一列中标记不超过 1 个椭圆。各列允许标记多少位候选人，您就可以标记多少位。

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your first-choice candidate.

**Incorrecto:** Marque solamente 1 óvalo para un candidato. Clasificar más candidatos no perjudicará a su candidato de primera elección.

**错误:** 为一位候选人标记不超过 1 个椭圆。为多个候选人排名不会影响您的首选候选人。

Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

Cualquier marca o escritura fuera de los espacios para votar puede anular su boleta.

Tiene derecho a una boleta de reemplazo. Si comete un error, pídale a un trabajador electoral una boleta nueva.

请勿在投票空间外写字或做任何标记，否则将导致您的选票作废。

您有权更换选票。如果不小心出错，请联系投票点工作人员索取新的选票。

Each language is a **column**.  
Each instruction is a **row**.

# Clearly separate RCV and non-RCV contests.

## Separate contests with a page turn or full width header and instructions.

We hear many concerns about whether voters will understand the difference between RCV and non-RCV contests on mixed contest ballot.

The solution is good ballot design, clear divisions between contest types, and instructions where voters need them to show when voters are transitioning between contest types.

### Separate with page turn

Instructions are at the top of each side of the ballot.

**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

**1/2**

**Instructions**

To vote for a candidate, completely fill in the oval next to their name.

To write in a candidate, write the name in the blank space and

You do not have to vote in every contest.

**!** If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot.

US Senator					
Vote for 1					
<input type="radio"/>	Victor Martinez	Federalist Party			
<input type="radio"/>	David Platt	People's Party			
<input type="radio"/>	Heather Portier	People's Party			
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in				
US Representative					
Vote for 1					
<input type="radio"/>	Glen Tawner	Federalist Party			
<input type="radio"/>	Carroll Forrest	People's Party			
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in				
Member of the State Assembly					
Vote for 1					
<input type="radio"/>	Edward Shiplett	Federalist Party			
<input type="radio"/>	Marty Talarico	People's Party			
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in				
Registrar of Deeds					
Vote for 1					
<input type="radio"/>	Lillian Cohen	Independent			
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in				

**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

**2/2**

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

Rank candidates in the order of your choice. Use the ovals in the columns marked choice 1, 2, 3, and so on.

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval in a column. You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.

**Wrong:** Mark only 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your 1st-choice candidate.

Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

Mayor						City Council				
Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.						Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.				
	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	1	2	3	4	5
Charlene Franz	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Gerard Harris	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Linda Bargmann	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Barbara Adcock	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Carrie Steel-Loy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Frederick Sharp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Frederick Sharp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					

Remember to vote both sides of the ballot.

### Separate with a full width header and instructions

If the ballot is very short, make sure the RCV instructions are before the first RCV contest.

**Official Ranked Choice Voting Ballot**  
County, State General Election Day of Week, Month DD, YYYY

**1/1**

**Instructions**

To vote for a candidate, completely fill in the oval next to their name.

To write in a candidate, write the name in the blank space and fill in the oval next to their name.

You do not have to vote in every contest.

**!** If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot.

US Senator		County Commissioners		Ballot Measures	
Vote for 1		Vote for 2		Measure A: State Casinos	
<input type="radio"/>	Victor Martinez	<input type="radio"/>	Harvey Smith	Vote yes or no	
<input type="radio"/>	David Platt	<input type="radio"/>	Randall Eagle	This change in the constitution allows the Legislature to approve up to 7 casinos in our state. Tax funds from the casinos will promote job growth, increase aid to schools, and allow local governments to lower property taxes. Should the amendment be approved?	
<input type="radio"/>	Heather Portier	<input type="radio"/>	Reid Davis	<input type="radio"/> Yes	
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	Hugh Feiser	<input type="radio"/> No	
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	Charles Qualey		
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	Write-in		
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	Write-in		

**Instructions for Ranked Choice Voting**

Rank candidates in the order of your choice. Use the ovals in the columns marked choice 1, 2, 3, and so on.

**Wrong:** Mark no more than 1 oval in a column. You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.

**Wrong:** Mark only 1 oval for a candidate. Ranking more candidates will not hurt your 1st-choice candidate.

Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.

You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot.

Mayor						City Council				
Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.						Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark only 1 oval in each column.				
	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	1	2	3	4	5
Charlene Franz	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Gerard Harris	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Linda Bargmann	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Barbara Adcock	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Carrie Steel-Loy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Frederick Sharp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Frederick Sharp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					

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# Checklist

## Designing RCV Ballots

### **Follow the EAC's best practices for ballot designs.**

- Is your text large enough?
- Does the ballot include white space so that candidate names are easy to read?
- Do contest headings and divider lines clearly separate contests and candidates?

### **Choose a ballot style that works for your jurisdiction.**

- What ballot style will you use?
- Does your election system include RCV tabulation or not?

### **Write clear, concise instructions.**

- Are the ballot instructions written in plain language?

### **Include visual instructions.**

- Does the ballot include an illustration of how to correctly mark?
- Are correct and incorrect ballot marking illustrations visually distinct from each other?

### **Put instructions where voters need them.**

- Have you included full instructions on supplementary materials?

### **Arrange multilingual ballots to support bilingual readers.**

- Are multilingual ballots laid out in a way that supports multilingual learning?

### **Clearly separate RCV and non-RCV contests.**

- How will you separate contest types of your ballot layout?

### **Make sure to test your demo ballot with voters!**

- Do you have a plan to test your ballots before the election?

# Copy & Paste

## RCV Instructions Text

**Snack.** At the top of the ballot page before the first RCV contest.

English	Spanish	Simplified Chinese
<p><b>Rank candidates in the order of your choice.</b> Use the ovals in the columns marked choice 1, 2, 3, and so on.</p>	<p><b>Clasifique a los candidatos en el orden de su elección.</b> Use los óvalos en las columnas marcadas como opción 1, 2, 3, y así sucesivamente.</p>	<p><b>根据您的选择给候选人排名。</b> 使用标有选择 1、2、3 等字样的竖列中的椭圆，以此类推。</p>
<p><b>Wrong: Mark no more than 1 oval in a column.</b> You may mark as many or as few candidates as the columns allow.</p>	<p><b>Incorrecto: Marque solamente 1 óvalo en una columna.</b> Puede marcar tantos candidatos como lo permitan las columnas.</p>	<p><b>错误：一列中标记不超过 1 个椭圆。</b> 各列允许标记多少位候选人，您就可以标记多少位。</p>
<p><b>Wrong: Mark no more than 1 oval for a candidate.</b> Ranking more candidates will not hurt your first choice candidate.</p>	<p><b>Incorrecto: Marque solamente 1 óvalo para un candidato.</b> Clasificar más candidatos no perjudicará a su candidato de primera elección.</p>	<p><b>错误：</b> <b>为一位候选人标记不超过 1 个椭圆。</b> 为多个候选人排名不会影响您的首选候选人。</p>
<p>Any mark or writing outside the spaces for voting may void your ballot.</p>	<p>Cualquier marca o escritura fuera de los espacios para votar puede anular su boleta.</p>	<p>请勿在投票空间外写字或做任何标记，否则将导致您的选票作废。</p>
<p>You have a right to a replacement ballot. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.</p>	<p>Tiene derecho a una boleta de reemplazo. Si comete un error, pídale a un trabajador electoral una boleta nueva.</p>	<p>您有权更换选票。 如果不小心出错，请联系投票点工作人员索取新的选票。</p>

**Bite.** Inside each contest.

English	Spanish	Simplified Chinese
<p>Rank up to 5 candidates. Mark <i>only</i> one oval in each column.</p>	<p>Clasifique hasta 5 candidatos. Marque solo un óvalo en cada columna.</p>	<p>最多可排列 5 名候选人。 每一列中只标记一个椭圆。</p>

# The research behind these best practices

## 2017 Research for Best Practices for RCV ballots and materials

In this project with Fair Vote and the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, we tested in locations with and without RCV including Southern California, NJ, Minneapolis, San Francisco/Oakland, Denver, and Maine. We worked with almost 200 people who identified as first-time voters, experienced voters, and a few non-voters.

Most of the studies were qualitative interviews with a few people, but we also ran a large-scale study in which voters tried voting on three different ballot styles. In another, we talked to voters immediately after voting in an RCV election in Maine to learn how they approached the challenge of ranking.

Our goal was to learn what helped voters understand and use RCV successfully. Participants used a simple voter education flyer, marked ballots, and answered questions about their reactions to RCV as a concept based on the materials used in the test. We updated the instructions and education flyer between studies, refining the approach.

## Overseas voters and runoff elections

Five states use ranked choice voting to allow overseas voters to participate in runoff elections by ranking their preferences for a runoff if their first choice is not a winner. Helping them do so successfully required explaining runoffs in addition to how to mark their ballot. This research included a survey of voting experiences with 79 voters. The usability test included 17 voters.

## Designing an accessible ranked choice ballot

We used the Anywhere Ballot interface as the basis for research into how to support voters who are blind or very low vision, have limited or no use of their hands, or have cognitive or attention disabilities. The research with 15 participants including voters with no use of their hands, autism or other attention and cognitive disabilities, and 6 blind voters used an interactive prototype.

[Read more about our research for Ranked Choice Voting at \*\*civicdesign.org\*\*](https://civicdesign.org)

# Additional Resources

Learn from our Civic Design Skill resources at [civicdesign.org](https://civicdesign.org)

## Plain Language

Field Guide Vol 1 [Writing instructions voters understand](#)

Field Guide Vol 4 [Effective poll worker materials](#)

## Information Design

Workbook [Designing a voter guide to an election](#)

- [Using colors effectively](#)
- [Planning for multiple languages](#)

Toolkit [Civic icons and images](#)

Toolkit [Election materials color palette](#) (accessible colors in 4 shades)

## Usability Testing

Field Guide Vol 3 [Testing ballots for usability](#)

Toolkit [Usability testing kit](#)

## Language Access

Workbook [Planning Language Access](#)



Center for  
Civic Design

**hello@civicdesign.org**  
**civicdesign.org**  
**@civicdesign**