

Ballot Standards

★ VIRGINIA ★
STATE BOARD *of* ELECTIONS

March 2018

Virginia State Board of Elections
1100 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Authority and Scope

The State Board of Elections (SBE) has the authority to prescribe ballot standards for elections within the Commonwealth (Va. Code § 24.2-613). Ballots must comply with all applicable Va. Code sections and these standards. These standards apply to all official ballots within the Commonwealth unless stated otherwise.

What's in this document

Code requirements	C Ballots must comply with these.
State Board requirements	B Ballots must comply with these.
Best practice recommendations	P Ballots should follow best practice recommendations to support voter performance. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best practices are strongly preferred, but are not required.• If technical constraints prevent compliance with best practices, please contact ELECT. We will work with you to meet the intent of the recommendation.
Examples	Illustrate how to meet the code requirements and best practice recommendations.
Resources and references	Guidelines based on research by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and the Center for Civic Design. You can download copies here: Designing polling place materials (eac.gov) Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent, Vols. 01-10 (civicdesign.org)

Who should use this document

General registrars

To ensure that you are meeting all of the requirements for ballot design and layout, including order of offices and for proofing ballots.

Ballot layout specialists

To ensure that ballots show the right content in the correct order.

You will also find best practice recommendations useful when you are making tradeoffs in formatting. The best practices represent the best possible design for ensuring voter intent is communicated.

ELECT staff

As a reference for proofing ballots.

How to use this document

Each major section includes three visual elements including: examples/illustrations, and indicators to differentiate requirements from recommended best practices:

①

Examples /
Illustration(s)

B

Commonwealth of Virginia, Official Ballot

City of Richmond

C

Republican Party Presidential Primary

Tuesday, March 1, 2016

P

Requirements vs. Best practice recommendations:

②

Indicators for
illustrations

C

These symbols identify requirements and best practices illustrated in visual examples. Best practice recommendations are taken from evidence-based studies by the EAC, NIST, and the Center for Civic Design.

B

P

③

Headers for
text

Requirements and best practices found in text are identified with these headers:

Code requirements

Board requirements

Best practice recommendations

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Overall Ballot Design

Overall Ballot Design

Fonts and Targets

Board requirements for fonts

Items required by Code or the State Board

- B** Items required to appear on the ballot – either by code or the State Board – must be no less than 10-point font.

Best practice recommendations for fonts

Font size

- P** Minimum font size of 12 points on the entire ballot.
Ballot headers should be the biggest content on the ballot, preferably at 18 points.

Use sans serif fonts

- P** Vendors and printers may select any highly readable sans serif font. Some examples are Calibri (the font used throughout this document), Arial (used in all of the examples), and Helvetica.
Avoid serif fonts, such as: Times New Roman, Georgia, Cambria.

Target ovals or boxes

- P** Ovals are preferred as targets for marking ballots rather than squares, rectangles, or arrows. Squares, rectangles or arrows may be used, so long as targets marked without filling in the target area entirely – including with a line, check mark, or “X” – always capture voter intent.
Line weight for the target oval or rectangle should provide adequate contrast to cue the voter.



Overall Ballot Design

The lines making up ovals or rectangles (to be filled in by the voter) should be black, not red. The emphasis is distracting and does not improve voter performance.

Order of Major Elements on the Ballot

**The ballot must be laid out
in this order**

- B** 1. Ballot Header (page 13)
- B** 2. Instructions for voters (page 16)
- B** 3. Offices and issues (starting on page 23)
- C** 4. Locality Seal (page 38)



Overall Ballot Design

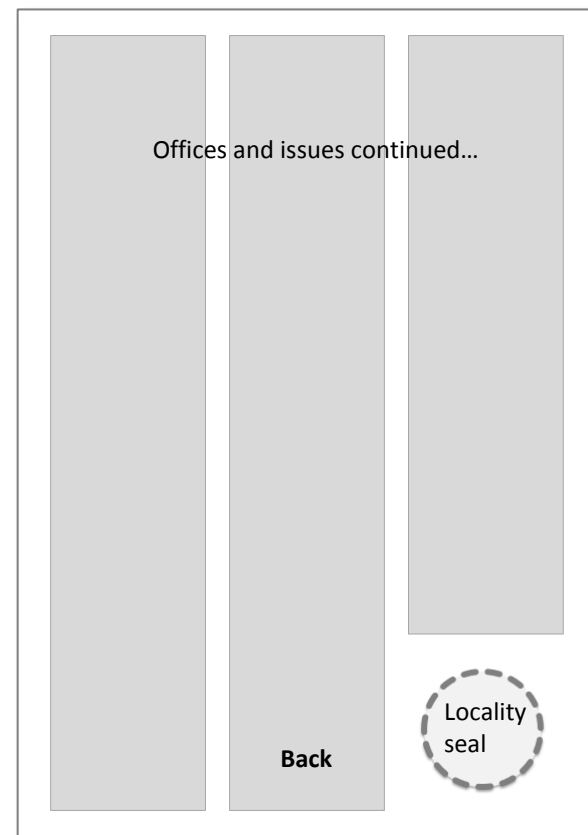
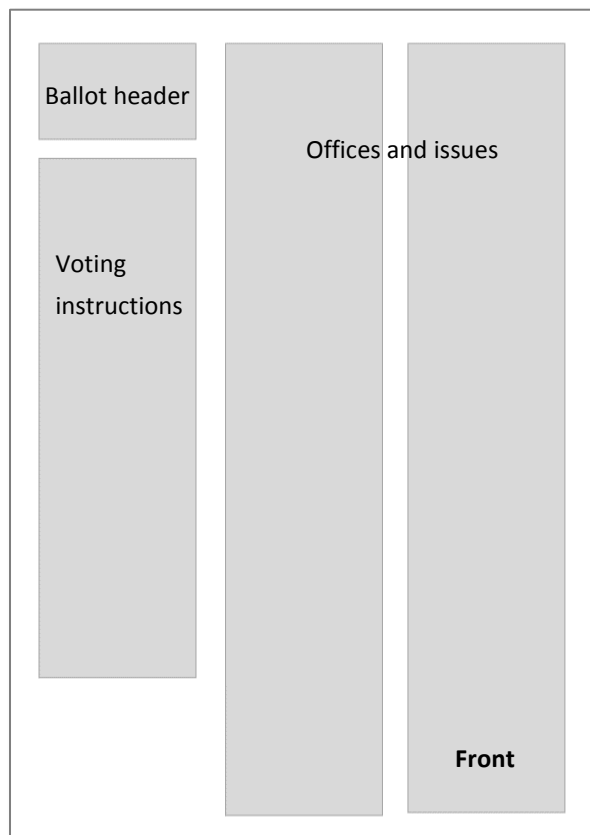
Acceptable Layouts

B You may use one of the two ballot layouts below (images are not to scale). If you would like to use a different layout, please request a requirements waiver (see page 40).

Ballot Layout 1: Best practice

(Instructions in left column)

P



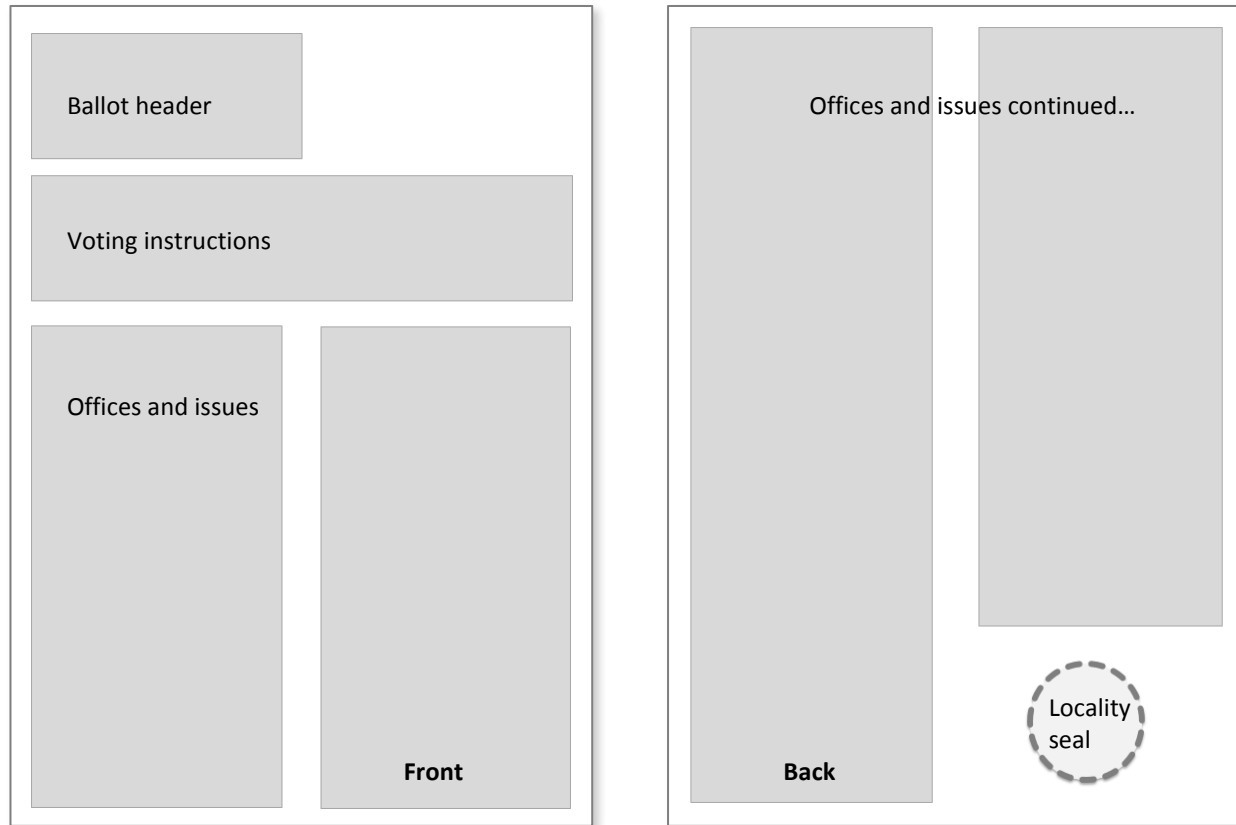


Overall Ballot Design

Ballot Layout 2

This layout is also acceptable, but not best practice to convey instructions to voters.

(Instructions across top)





Overall Ballot Design

Best practice recommendations for ballot design

Type case	Use mixed case (avoid using all capital letters).
Justification	Left-justify text (avoid centered text).
Fonts	Use a single sans serif font family throughout the ballot.
Adding emphasis	Use emphasis sparingly. Never use italics or underlining on a ballot. Use big enough type – but not too big.
Help voters know what to do and where to go next	Put instructions where voters need them. Use contrast and color functionally. Decide what is most important (not everything should be bold or large type). Don't split offices across columns.
Two-sided ballots	On 2-sided ballots, include instructions on the front of the ballot, at the bottom of the right-hand column to continue voting, like this:

Turn the ballot over



Overall Ballot Design

Best practice recommendations for instructions to voters

Illustrations	Use accurate instructional illustrations.
Language and formatting	<p>Use clear, simple language in a positive voice.</p> <p>Write in the active voice, where the person doing the action comes before the verb.</p> <p>Use emphasis sparingly. Never use italics or underlining on a ballot.</p> <p>Use big enough type – but not too big.</p>
Content	<p>Include instructions on how to request a new ballot, and how voters may write in a candidate.</p> <p>Include information that will prevent voters from making errors.</p> <p>Keep paragraphs and sentences short.</p> <p>Use short, simple everyday words.</p> <p>When giving instructions that are more than one step, make each step an item in a numbered list.</p> <p>Separate paragraphs by a space so each paragraph stands out on the page or screen.</p>



Ballot Headers

Ballot Headers

Ballot header examples

B Commonwealth of Virginia
Official Ballot
City of Richmond
C General and Special Elections
Tuesday, November 7, 2017

P — *“Commonwealth of Virginia”
and “Official Ballot” in 18-point.
The rest of the information in 12-
point.*

OR

B Commonwealth of Virginia, Official Ballot
City of Richmond
C Republican Party Presidential Primary
Tuesday, March 1, 2016



Ballot Headers

Code requirements for ballot headers

Non-presidential primaries	Must include the political party name before the words ‘Primary Election’.
(Va. Code § 24.2-529)	For example: Republican Party Primary Election Democratic Party Primary Election

Board requirements for ballot headers

Title	“Commonwealth of Virginia” and “Official Ballot” on one or two lines.	
Locality	Name of locality	
Name of election	General election without specials, referendum, or amendments	General Election
	General election with specials, referendum, or amendments	General and Special Elections
	Special Elections	Special Election
	Primaries	Republican Party Primary Democratic Party Primary
	Presidential Primaries	Republican Party Presidential Primary Democratic Party Presidential Primary
	Date of election	Must be written as day of the week, month date, and year. For example, Tuesday, November 7, 2017.



Ballot Headers

Best practice recommendations for ballot headers

Font Size No smaller than 12-point and should not be larger than 18-point.
In the example, “Commonwealth of Virginia” and “Official Ballot” are 18-point.
The rest of the information is 12-point.

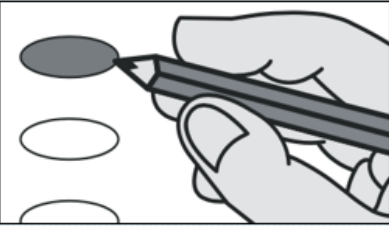
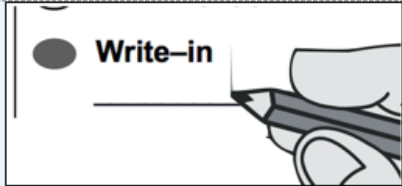


Voting Instructions

Voting instructions

Voting instruction examples

Best practice: instructions in the leftmost column of a 3-column layout

Instructions	
P	Making selections 
B	To vote for a candidate , fill in the oval next to the name. To vote on an issue , fill in the oval next to YES or NO.
	 Write-in
	To write in a qualified candidate who is not already on the ballot, fill in the oval and write the name of the person on the line. If you want to change a vote or if you have made a mistake, ask an election worker for another ballot. If you make marks on the ballot besides filling in the oval, your votes may not be counted.

Remember:

Voters perform best when instructions are close to where they are needed.

Voters are more likely to read and use instructions when they appear in the left column of a multi-column ballot than when the instructions are across the top of the ballot.



Voting Instructions

A conventional 2-column layout is acceptable if 3-columns will not work (for example, if candidate names are long). Instructions on this type of layout are placed across the top of the ballot, between the office header and the offices:

Example of voting instructions across the top of the ballot:

P Instructions to voters

To vote for a candidate, fill in the oval next to the name, like this: [illustration]

B

To vote on an issue, fill in the oval next to YES or NO.

To write in a qualified candidate who is not already on the ballot, fill in the oval and write the name of the person on the line.

If you want to change a vote or if you have made a mistake, ask an election worker for another ballot.

If you make marks on the ballot besides filling in the oval, your votes may not be counted.



Voting Instructions

Board requirements for voting instructions

- Ballot types** All ballot types must include voting instructions.
- Voter intent** Voting instructions must present the voter with clear instructions on how to mark the ballot the way they intend.
- Primaries** Do not include instructions for write-ins on primary ballots.

Best practice recommendations for voting instructions

- Wording** Use the instructions in the example above, as closely as possible.
- Emphasize actions** Use bold to emphasize actions for voters.
- Illustrations** Include an illustration that shows how to mark the ballot correctly.
- Lists** Do not use numbered or bulleted lists. The emphasis in each sentence does not need a bullet. The sentences are not steps in a process.

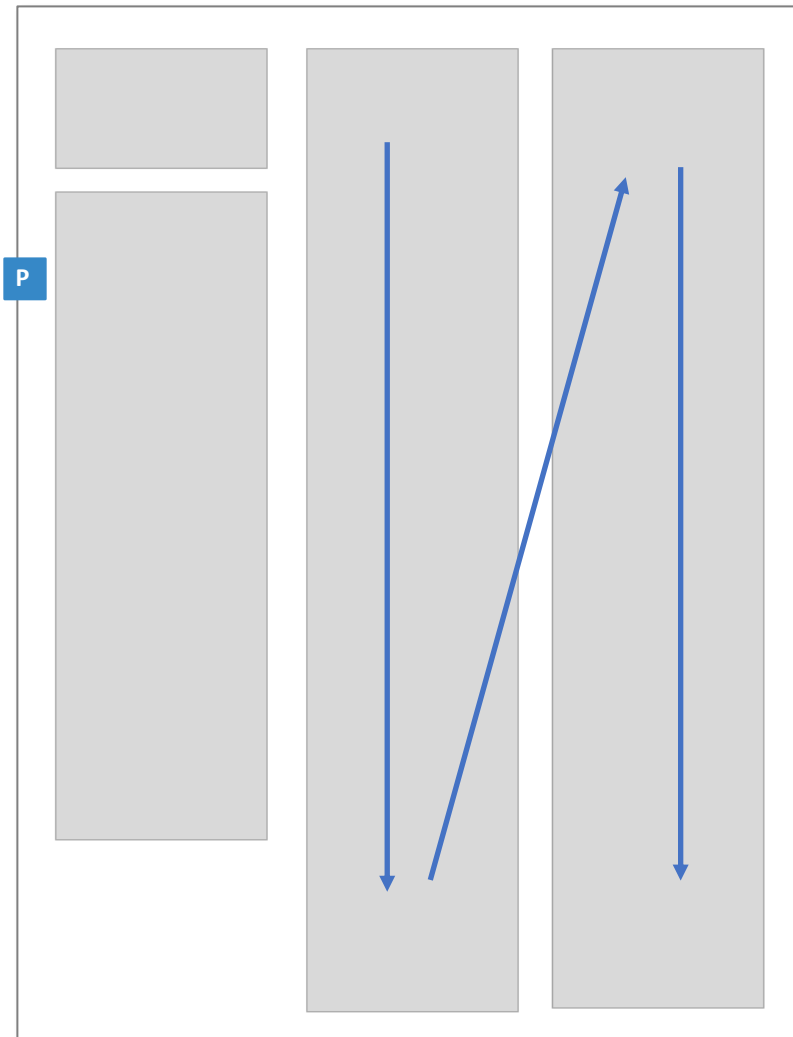


Ballot Order

Ballot Order

Board requirements for ballot order

You can list offices
down-then-across the ballot.
This layout is best practice:





Ballot Order

Code requirements for ballot order

(Va. Code §24.2-613) All offices to be elected must be placed before any question.

Board requirements for ballot order

Lay out the ballot with all of the offices, amendments, and issues as shown below.

If there is a general election and a special election for the same type of office, list the general election before the special. For example, this may happen when filling a vacated seat.

Offices must be placed in this order:

Ballot Placement	Office/Issue title
------------------	--------------------

Statewide Offices

- 1 President
- 2 Member United States Senate
- 3 Member House of Representatives
- 4 Governor
- 5 Lieutenant Governor
- 6 Attorney General

Regional Offices

- 7 Member Senate of Virginia
- 8 Member House of Delegates

Locality-wide Offices

- 9 Clerk of Court



Ballot Order

Ballot Placement	Office/Issue title
------------------	--------------------

Locality-wide Offices (continued)

- 10 Commonwealth's Attorney
- 11 Sheriff
- 12 Commissioner of Revenue
- 13 Treasurer
- 14 Chairman Board of Supervisors
County Board
Mayor, City
- 15 Member Board of Supervisors At Large
Member City Council At Large
- 16 Chairman School Board
- 17 Member School Board At Large

District/Magisterial/Ward Offices

- 18 Member Board of Supervisors
Member City Council Super District/Ward
Member City Council Election
- 19 Member School Board Super District/Ward
- 20 Member School Board
- 21 Soil and Water Conservation Director

Town Offices

- 22 Mayor
- 23 Member Town Council At Large



Ballot Order

Ballot Placement	Office/Issue title
------------------	--------------------

Town Offices (continued)

- 24 Member Town Council
- 25 Recorder
- 26 Treasurer

Statewide Issues, if applicable

- 27 Proposed Constitutional Amendment (statewide)
- 28 Proposed Bond Referendum (statewide)

Regional Issues, if applicable

- 29 Regional Referendum

Locality-wide Issues, if applicable

- 30 Bond Issues
- 31 Referendum

District/Ward Issues, if applicable

- 32 Referendum

Town Issues, if applicable

- 33 Referendum



Office Headers

Office Headers

Officer Header examples

General election

B	Member Senate of Virginia District 99 C Vote for only one
----------	---

Special election, without designation

Member Senate of Virginia District 9 For unexpired term to end December 31, 2015 Vote for only one
--

P — Use shading to off-set the office headers and instructions for voting.

Special election, with designation

Member Senate of Virginia Special Election For unexpired term to end December 31, 2015 Vote for only one
--

Special election, with term on 2 lines

Member Senate of Virginia, Special Election For unexpired term to end December 31, 2015 Vote for only one



Office Headers

Officer Header examples, continued

Examples for
down-ballot
offices

**Member
School Board
Jack Jouett District**
Vote for only one

**Mayor
Town of Glasgow**
Vote for only one

**Member Town Council
Town of Brodnax**
Vote for not more than three

**Member Town Council – At Large
Town of Amherst**
Vote for only one

**Member Town Council, At Large
Town of Amherst**
Vote for only one



Office Headers

Officer Header examples, continued

Presidential elections

President and Vice President	
C	Vote for only one
C	Democratic Party Electors for <input type="radio"/> Anna Mae Sterner , President and Leslie Michelle Voiles , Vice President
	Republican Party Electors for <input type="radio"/> James X. Spool , President and Herbert Adams , Vice President
	<input type="radio"/> Write-in _____



Office Headers

Code requirements for office headers

“Vote for...” Instructions

(Va. code § 24.2-613(D))

For general, special, and primary elections, “Vote for...” instructions must not be smaller than 10-point type.

Must appear immediately below the title of any office.

Offices to which only one candidate can be elected must say:

“Vote for only one”

Instructions for offices to which more than one candidate can be elected must say:

“Vote for not more than *n*”

...where “*n*” is a number, written out. For example:

Vote for not more than three

“Electors for...”

(Va. Code § 24.2-614)

In Presidential elections, the words “Electors for” must appear between the party name and the name of the presidential candidate.



Office Headers

Board requirements for office headers

Order of elements in office blocks	Office title (such as “Governor”)
	Town, District, or Ward
	For special elections only: “For unexpired term to end June 20, 2019”
	“Vote for” instructions (see above)
	Candidate names
	Write-in line(s), except for primaries
Member offices	<p>Start with the word, “Member.”</p> <p>The word “Member” should be on its own line, space permitting.</p> <p>Include a “-” (hyphen) or “,” (comma) and the words “At Large” for an at-large seat.</p> <p>For example: Member Town Council - At Large Member Town Council, At Large</p> <p>Be consistent in usage of dashes or commas throughout the ballot.</p>
Special elections	The words “Special Election” are optional in the office title. If you choose to label the office with “Special Election” then use one of these formats:
Office title	[Office name], Special Election [Office name] - Special Election
Unexpired term	<p>Be consistent in usage of dashes or commas throughout the ballot.</p> <p>The text “For unexpired term to end June 20, 2019” must appear immediately preceding the “Vote for” instructions.</p>



Office Headers

Best practice recommendations for office headers

Shading Use shading to off-set the office headers and instructions for voting.
Shading should be 10% gray or cyan.

Separate candidate list You may also separate the headers from the candidate lists using a light horizontal rule of 0.25 point to 0.50 point.

Be consistent The examples on pages 23 - 25 show variations. Use the same variation throughout. The examples above show variations. Use the same variation throughout.

Term Expiration Wording for term expiration can include or exclude the preposition “on.”
For example: For unexpired term to end on December 31, 2015
For unexpired term to end December 31, 2015



Candidate Order and Name Formats

Candidate Order and Name Formats

Non-presidential candidate names

“Vote for” language is set in code. —

C

The Board sets standards for ballot names. —

B

Candidate order is set in code. —

C

**Member
Board of Supervisors**
For unexpired term to end on December 31, 2015

Vote for not more than three

- Aaron J. Peskin II**
- Barb Jean Bush Jr.**
- G. Duane Kruse**
- Janice C. “Ginny” Redish**
- Erin J. Michael**
- Write-in**

P

Candidate names should be in mixed case, bold type.

Code requirements for candidate names

(Va. Code §24.2-613)

All elections

The names of all candidates printed on the ballot must be in the same font, size, and style.

(Va. Code §24.2-529)

Primary elections

List names in the order in which the candidates completed filing.

In the event two or more candidates file simultaneously, the order of filing is determined by lot by the electoral board or the State Board as in the case of a tie vote for the office.

No write-in shall be permitted on ballots in primary elections.



Candidate Order and Name Formats

Board requirements for candidate names

For all offices *except president / vice president*, candidate names follow this formula on the ballot:

First name or initial + middle name or initial + (optional) “nickname” + last name + suffix.

Title Do not include a title with the name – neither before, nor after. Examples of titles include Rev., Dr., Mrs., Mr., etc.

Candidates must use their given name and not the name of their spouse. For example:

Mary L. Jones

Not: Mrs. John W. Jones

First name Must use first name or initial or familiar form of first name.

Middle name Must use middle name or initial or familiar form of middle name.

Initials Initials may be used instead of either the first or middle name or both.

Nickname Must be in double quotation marks, if used.

Last name Must use the last name as it appears on the candidate’s voter registration record.

Suffix Must be used if included on the candidate’s voter registration record.

NOTE: If a candidate’s name cannot meet the above requirements because there is no middle name – or for some other reason – contact ELECT for acceptable accommodations.



Candidate Order and Name Formats

Board requirements for candidate names, continued...

Examples of acceptable name formats

As an example, the candidate's full legal name is Thomas Wendell Smyth III. The candidate can specify any of these options:

- Tom W. Smyth III
- T. Wendell Smyth III
- Thomas W. Smyth III
- Thomas Wendell Smyth III
- T.W. "Tom" Smyth III
- T.W. "Sparky" Smyth III
- T.W. Smyth III
- TW Smyth III

Presidential / Vice Presidential Candidate Names

Presidential and vice-presidential candidate names appear on the ballot as specified to the State Board by the nominating party or candidate.

Fit the full candidate name on one line

The full candidate name must fit on one line of the ballot. This includes any punctuation and spaces.

If the candidate's name goes onto a second line, contact ELECT staff for support. They will suggest appropriate accommodations so that you can meet this requirement.



Candidate Order and Name Formats

Best Practice Recommendations

Candidate names should be in mixed case, bold type.

P

Member
House of Delegates
58th District
Vote for not more than three
<input type="radio"/> Aaron Peskin II (D)
<input type="radio"/> Barb Jean Bush Jr. (R)
<input type="radio"/> G. Duane Kruse (L)
<input type="radio"/> Janice C. "Ginny" Redish (G)
<input type="radio"/> Erin J. Michael (G)
<input type="radio"/> Write-in

<input type="radio"/> Write-in

<input type="radio"/> Write-in

C

Show party designation for federal, statewide, and General Assembly offices.



Political Party Order and Appearance

Political Party Order and Appearance

Code requirements for political party order and appearance

- Party designation** A political party name must identify candidates that have been nominated for federal, statewide, and General Assembly offices. Party identification is only present on ballots in federal, statewide, and General Assembly elections (Va. code § 24.2-613).
- Order of parties** *General and Special Elections*
The State Board determines by lot the order of the political parties, and the names of all candidates for a particular office shall appear together in the order determined for their parties.
Independent candidates always appear last and in the order they filed all required paperwork (Va. code § 24.2-613).

Board requirements for political party order and appearance

- Appearance of political party names** Party abbreviations must be in accordance with the SBE determination made at the time of the party order drawing.

Best practice recommendations for political party order and appearance

- Party name format** If the SBE determines party names are to be spelled out, then the names of the parties should be mixed case, regular (non-bold) type, following candidate names in mixed case, bold type.
- Emphasis of party abbreviation** If you abbreviate the party name, it should appear in regular (non-bold) type, following the candidate name in mixed case, bold type.



Write-ins

Write-ins

Write-in Example

Write-ins are after the last candidate's name; show a target for each write-in space; include the words "Write-in" followed by a line for voters to write the name. Include the same number of write-in lines as the number of seats to be elected.

For the words, "Write-in," use the same font size and weight as candidate names.

The line for writing in the name is under the words "Write-in" with enough line space for the voter to write the name.

Member Board of Supervisors	
Vote for not more than three	
<input type="radio"/>	Aaron Peskin II (D)
<input type="radio"/>	Barb Jean Bush Jr. (R)
<input type="radio"/>	G. Duane Kruse (L)
<input type="radio"/>	Janice C. "Ginny" Redish (IG)
<input type="radio"/>	Erin J. Michael (I)
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in _____
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in _____
<input type="radio"/>	Write-in _____

B

P



Write-ins

Code requirements for write-ins

Scope	Write-in sections must be included on all ballots, except in primary elections.
(Va. Code § 24.2-529)	Write-ins are not permitted in primary elections.

Board requirements for write-ins

Where	After the last candidate's name.
Target	Write-in lines must show a target (oval, rectangle, etc.) for each write-in space.
Language	Include the words "Write-in" using a hyphen followed by a line for voters to write the name.
Number of write-in lines	There must be the same number of write-in lines as the number of seats to be elected. For example, an office with the instruction, 'Vote for not more than three' should have 3 lines for the voter to write in or leave enough space for voters to write in 3 separate names.

Best practice recommendations for write-ins

Font size and weight	For the words, "Write-in," use the same font size and weight as candidate names.
Location of line	Put the line for writing in the name under the words "Write-in" with enough line space for the voter to write the name. The line may also be next to or above the words "Write-in" if voting systems cannot accommodate the line underneath. If presented on the same line, the words "Write-in" should be to the left of the write-in line.



Amendments, Referendums, and Bonds

Amendments, Referendums, and Bonds

*Title,
then Question,
then Answer
options.*

C

Meals tax

Shall the County of Amelia be authorized to levy a tax, at a rate of 4% or less, on the amount charged for prepared food and beverages sold in the County, as provided by §58.1-3833 of the Code of Virginia, as amended, with the stipulation that the revenue from such a tax shall be used to fund operational expenses and capital projects related to fire protection and emergency medical services?

*Include content
exactly as it is
written in
legislation or
the Writ.*

C

This tax would be imposed in addition to the current general retail sales and use taxes collected on all purchases. Thus, if this food and beverage tax is adopted and the maximum rate of 4% is imposed, then the total tax on all prepared food and beverages will be 9.3%

*“Yes” and “No”
in individual
blocks or lines
after the text of
the question.*

C

Yes

P

No

*Issues in 12-point type,
mixed case, left justified.*

*“Yes” and “No” choices in
bold type.*



Amendments, Referendums, and Bonds

Code requirements for amendments, referendums, and bonds

Layout (Va. code § 24.2-684)

Amendments, referendums, and bonds should be laid out in the following order:

- Title
- Question
- Answer options: Place “Yes” and “No” in individual blocks or lines after the text of the question.

Language (Va. code § 24.2-684)

Referendums must:

- Include statewide and regional content exactly as it is written in the legislation passed by the General Assembly.
- Include local content exactly as it is written in the Circuit Court’s Writ.

Best practice recommendations for amendments, referendums, and bonds

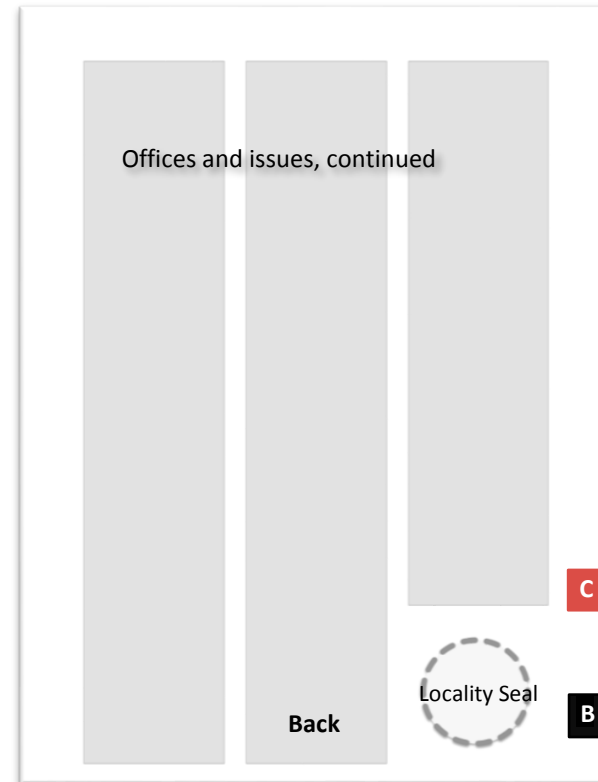
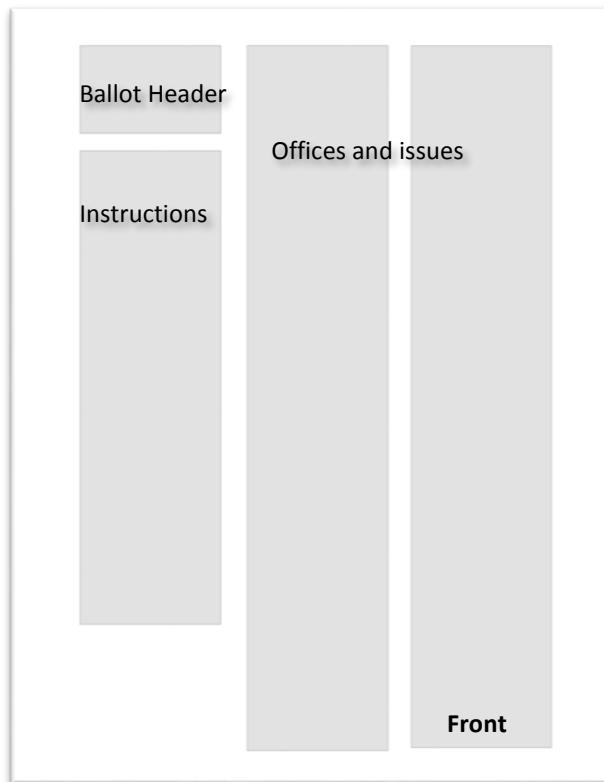
Text of issues should be in 12-point type, mixed case, and left justified (not fully justified).

The “Yes” and “No” choices should be in bold type.



Locality Seal

Locality Seal



C

Code stipulates the seal must be on the reverse side of the ballot.

B

See additional Board Requirements below.



Locality Seal

Code requirements for the locality seal

The official seal of the locality must go on the reverse side of the ballot (Va. code § 24.2-619).

Board requirements for the locality seal

If all issues and offices fit on the front of the ballot, the seal must still go on the back.

If the issues and offices use both the front and back of the ballot, include the seal on the back if it fits after the issues and offices.

There is no specified requirement for the size of the seal.



Waivers

Waivers

The State Board of Elections has adopted a waiver process from Board Requirements of the prescribed ballot standards for localities. The Board has delegated this authority, and any procedure related to it, to the Commissioner of Elections and the Department of Elections.

A locality seeking a waiver from Board Requirements of the Ballot Standards must receive approval from the Commissioner of Elections. A formal procedure for seeking a waiver will be released at a later date.