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How to Vote by Mail

Words to know

Voting by mail is when you mail in your vote for an election. When you vote by mail, you do not need to go to a polling place to vote in person.

Absentee voting is another name for when you mail in your vote for an election.

A **ballot** is the piece of paper you use to vote.

An **election office** is a group of people who run the elections in your area.

A **witness** is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot. A witness cannot tell you how to vote. They cannot look at your ballot. They should just sign where it says witness.

This guide will teach you how to vote by mail. **Voting by mail** is when you mail in your vote for an election. This is also called **absentee voting**. When you vote by mail, you do not need to go to a polling place to vote in person. This year, because of [COVID-19](#), many people are staying home as much as possible. When you vote by mail, you can have your say in an election and still stay home.

When you vote by mail, your state sends you a **ballot**. A ballot is the piece of paper you vote on. After you fill out your ballot, you mail it back. In some states, you can also drop it off at certain places.

You can vote by mail in every state, but some states have rules on how to vote by mail. In most states, you have to fill out a form to request a ballot.

In most states, anyone can vote by mail. In some states, you are only allowed to vote by mail if there is a reason you can't vote in person. Some reasons are: moving out of state or having a disability that makes it hard to vote in person. If you are worried about Covid-19, you can use that as a reason in some states. If you live in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina or Indiana, you need to have a reason. You can check your state's rules in the next part of this guide.

You can look at the next part of this guide on how to vote by mail in your state. You can also check if you can vote by mail by looking at the website for your state election office [here](#).

Step 1: Check if you are registered to vote.

First, you need to [register to vote](#). You can register or check if you are registered to vote [here](#). If you are under guardianship and are not sure if you can vote, you can read more [here](#). If you have moved, changed your name, or become a citizen, you will need to let your state know. You can learn about how to let them know [here](#).

Step 2: Ask for a mail-in ballot.

If you are able to vote by mail, you can ask for a mail-in ballot [here](#). In some states, the state government will send you a ballot, even if you don't ask. You can learn if your state sends everyone a ballot by looking at your state's page in our guide. You can also check with your state's election office.

Step 3: Check the deadlines.

It is important to make sure you know the deadlines for voting in your state. In some states if your ballot doesn't arrive by the election, your vote won't be counted. In some states, you need to mail it on or before the date of the election. It's really important to know the deadlines of your state election, so your vote is counted. You can find those deadlines [here](#).

Step 4: Fill out the ballot.

Soon after you ask for a ballot, you will get your ballot in the mail. Read the directions carefully. They will tell you how to fill out your ballot, Make sure to use a black or blue ink pen. If you need help learning more about the candidates on your ballot, look at [Ballotopedia](#).

Some states ask for witnesses. A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot.

Some states might ask you to include a copy of a document that proves your identity. This document could be your voter registration, driver's license or state identification card. **Read your state's rules very carefully.** See our guide to find your state's rules.

You need to sign your ballot. There will be instructions about where to sign. There will also be instructions on how to seal your ballot.

Make sure you sign and seal the ballot. If your ballot came with instructions about how to seal it, read and follow the instructions very carefully. For example, if your ballot needs to be put in a special envelope when you send it back, make sure it goes in that envelope.

Step 5: Mail (or drop off) the ballot.

Once you have sealed the ballot, you can drop it off in any United States Postal Service mailbox. In most states, you will need to add a stamp to your ballot.

You could put it in your mailbox at your home, you could drop it in a blue box marked USPS, or you can take it to your post office to mail it.

In some states there are [special ballot boxes or other places](#) where you can drop off your ballot.

It is important to submit your ballot as soon as possible. This year there have been delays in the US postal service. We want to make sure that everyone's vote is counted!

Congratulations! You have voted by mail.

Common Questions about Voting By Mail

What do I do if I don't get my ballot?

Contact your state board of elections. They can send you another ballot. You can find the contact information in the state guide.

How can I learn more about the candidates on the ballot?

Check out [Ballotopedia](#). If you enter your address, you can see what is on your ballot.

When is the latest I can turn in my ballot?

That depends on your state deadline. To learn your state's deadlines, check [this](#) out.

What happens if I vote for more than one candidate?

Your vote might not count. Make sure you follow the directions on the ballot. If you accidentally vote for more than one candidate, do not turn in your ballot. Ask your state board of elections for a new ballot.

What happens if I skip questions on the ballot?

You do not have to vote for every election on the ballot. If you do not know how you want to vote or do not want to vote, that is okay.

You have to sign your ballot. If you do not sign your ballot, the whole ballot will not be counted.

What do I do if I make a mistake on my ballot?

Call your state board of elections. If there is enough time, they can mail you another ballot. If there is not enough time, you can vote in-person or vote early.

Do I need to prove my identity when I vote?

This depends on your state. To find out if you need to prove your identity in your state, **look for your state information in the rest of this guide.**

Some states ask for witnesses. A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot.

Some states might ask you to include a copy of a document that proves your identity. This document could be your voter registration, driver's license or state identification card. **Read your state's rules very carefully.**

What are witnesses and do I need them?

Voters in some states must have a witness when they fill out their ballot. A witness is someone that watches while you fill out your ballot. Witnesses sign to say that you are the one that filled out your own ballot.

Not all states need witnesses. To find out if your state needs you to have a witness, look at your state's rules in the next part of the guide. You can also check the information on your ballot.

A witness is not allowed to tell you how to vote. They are not supposed to look at your ballot.

What should I do if I am scared of getting sick or making my witness sick?

The witness can be socially distanced while you fill out the ballot. This means the witness sits or stands six feet away or more. They could also watch through a window. They can wear a mask and gloves. They can also use a different pen. They can also use hand sanitizer or wash their hands with soap. By taking these steps, you can help stop the spread of germs.

If I received my ballot by mail, can I still vote in person?

In some states, you can vote in person **if you do not mail in your ballot**. In some states, you must give them your mail-in ballot in exchange for an in-person ballot. In some states, you can turn in your mail-in ballot at your polling place. Check your state's rules to see if you can vote in person.

In all states, **if you have mailed in your ballot, you cannot vote in person**. Voting twice is against the law.

What can I do if I am worried about mailing my ballot?

You can see if your state has [ballot boxes](#) or will allow you to drop off your ballot at a [polling place](#). To check this, call your state board of elections.

This year, there have been delays at the US Post Office. Some people worry that their ballot may not arrive in time to be counted. You should mail in your ballot at least a week before Election Day. You want to make sure that there is plenty of time for your ballot to arrive. You should also request your mail-in ballot as soon as possible.

What are some mistakes people make when filling out their ballots?

Here is a [list](#) of mistakes people sometimes make when filling out the ballots and how to not do them.

What if I am in the military or an American living in another country?

You have special rules for how your ballot works. If you are in the military, you can find your rules [here](#). If you are an American living in another country, you can find your rules [here](#).