



**Jefferson County** WASHINGTON

# Election Observer's Guide

**Welcome to our office, please come in.**



**Jefferson County Election**

[elections@co.jefferson.wa.us](mailto:elections@co.jefferson.wa.us)

1820 Jefferson St.

PO Box 563

Port Townsend WA 98368

(360)385-9119

(360)385-9117

## Introduction

Welcome to Jefferson County Elections. You have been appointed to observe the election process as an official representative of your political party. Your role is to provide a truly independent perspective of the election process. Observing the entire election process helps to build public confidence in the accuracy and integrity of elections.

The role of the observer is vastly different than that of the election worker. As an observer it is important for you to understand the election process but you are prohibited by law from touching or handling any ballots, whereas the election worker is at the Election Center to complete an individual task, but not necessarily know the complete process.

Please remember that the official observer program is dictated by State law and is a formal agreement between your party and the Jefferson County Auditor. If you have any questions, please direct them to the Election Staff.

State laws (RCW) and state regulations (WAC) referenced are in this guide. If you have questions regarding these statutes, please direct them to the Election Staff.

This guide is intended to explain the process of issuing, processing, and counting ballots. It is not intended to be a substitute for the statutes governing this process, but rather should be read in conjunction with them.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns you have. If, for any reason, you have any questions or concerns that we have not adequately addressed, you are encouraged to contact the Election Division at the Office of the Secretary of State.

Office of the Secretary of State  
Elections Division  
PO Box 40229  
Olympia WA 98504  
[elections@sos.wa.gov](mailto:elections@sos.wa.gov)  
(800) 448-4881

# Table of Contents

# Page #

Introduction . . . . .	2
Duties and Responsibilities of the Political Observer . . . . .	4
Observer Guidelines . . . . .	5
What is a Logic and Accuracy Test? . . . . .	6
Recounts . . . . .	7
Ballot Path . . . . .	8
Glossary . . . . .	10

**We've come a long way ....**



**(Jefferson County Auditor's Office – early 1900's)**

## Duties and Responsibilities

Anyone has the right to observe any part of the election process. Observers may watch any, or all, aspects of the election. You are encouraged to observe:

- Logic and accuracy tests prior to Election Day.
- Signature comparison.
- Opening and inspection of ballots.
- Election Night procedures.
- Ballot duplication.
- Counting of ballots.
- Storing and securing the ballots.
- Processing of provisional ballots.
- Reconciliation of ballots.
- Canvassing board meetings.
- Certification of the election.
- Any other times when ballots are handled by the Election Staff.

There are a few things we ask of you:

- To provide a truly independent perspective of the election process.
- Be at the Election Processing Center on time.
- Follow the Observer Guidelines.
- Wear your badge identifying you and your party.
- Bring questions and concerns to the attention of the Election Staff.
- Be aware and respectful of other functions of the Auditor's office and the public they are serving.



# Official Observer Guidelines

**We have included the following guidelines to help you understand the role of an Official Observer and what is expected of you.**

1. Each major political party will be contacted prior to each election and given the work schedule of ballot processing. The Auditor shall request that each party appoint representatives to observe the process. Before final assignment as observers, the Auditor, who may refuse to approve any person so appointed, shall review the list of appointed party representatives.
2. Each party is responsible for recruiting and scheduling their own observers as they choose. Ballot processing will continue, regardless of whether observers are present or not. Parties will be notified of any schedule changes as they occur.
3. When more than one (1) observer has been requested, each party is to designate who acts as their party "Supervisor". The name badge shall indicate "Supervisor" as well as party affiliation.
4. Official observers are volunteer positions.
5. Official observers are required to wear a badge identifying you as the official observer of your party. You will be required to wear this badge while you are here.
6. In order for you to effectively do your job, you need to understand what is happening around you. Please ask the Election Staff whenever you are unfamiliar with a certain process. Remember, as the official party observer, it is your responsibility to bring your questions or concerns to our attention.
7. Observers may view any process that occurs during their shift. Feel free to move about in the Election Processing Center to observe staff at work, but please be careful not to interfere with processing.
8. By law, observers may not touch ballots, ballot containers, or vote tallying equipment. Please remember this while performing your duties.
9. As an observer, you are expected to remain objective and independent from the Election Department. Please refrain from any actions which may jeopardize this status or appear as a conflict of interest.
10. Due to time constraints and the critical nature of our job, we cannot allow workers to be disrupted. Please help us maintain a work environment free of distractions so that everyone can concentrate on their current task. This does not include speaking to the Election Staff. Part of our job is to answer your questions.

## What is a Logic and Accuracy Test?

It is the process used to check and make sure our vote counting system is correctly counting votes cast for all candidates as well as all voting responses. The test also verifies the machine(s) are functioning to specifications.

Whenever possible, the equipment is operated during the test by the same persons who will be responsible for the actual ballot count.

We are required to test the voting machine(s) twice before an election.

1. The first test is done prior to the official test and before ballots are scheduled to be mailed. This test is referred to as our unofficial in-house logic and accuracy test.
2. The second test is our official logic and accuracy test and must be done at least three (3) days before each election. Notice is given to the local newspaper in accordance with RCW 42.30 (Open Public Meeting Act). Candidates, if applicable, political parties and the media are also given notice.

How do we test the machine?

We create a test deck using actual ballots. If multiple ballot styles/precincts are being used in an election, each style/precinct is marked using the same pattern. We mark votes for candidates, for and against measures, overvotes (when two or more candidates are marked or both "yes" and "no" for a measure are marked) and undervotes (when nothing is marked for a measure or office).

Total votes cast for each candidate and measure and # of ballots used for the test are pre-determined and tracked on an excel spreadsheet. This is referred to as the logic and accuracy planning matrix.

The ballots are run through the vote counting system and the results for each candidate and measure are checked against the matrix to make sure they match. **ALL TOTALS MUST MATCH** for the test to be accurate.

The test deck is kept separate from the real ballots cast by voters during the election.

The official logic and accuracy test shall be certified by the county auditor or deputy, the secretary of state representative (if state issues are on the ballot), and any political party observers.

If for any reason, changes are made to the ballot counting programming after the official logic and accuracy test, an emergency logic and accuracy test must be conducted.

# Recounts

## Mandatory Recount

### Statewide offices or measures

Machine recounts - the difference between the two candidates or choices must be:

- Less than 2000 votes difference AND;
- Less than ½ of one percent.

Hand recounts - the difference between the two candidates or choices must be:

- Less than 1000 votes AND;
- Less than ¼ of one percent.

### Local Offices

Machine recounts – the difference between the two candidates must be:

- Less than 2000 votes difference AND;
- Less than ½ of one percent.

Hand recounts – the difference between the two candidates must be:

- Less than 150 votes difference AND;
- Less than ¼ of one percent.

Measures, other than statewide initiatives and referendums, do not qualify for mandatory recounts under state law. They may be recounted, however, as a requested recount.

All recounts require the re-examination of undervotes in the race being recounted. Re-examination of undervotes will detect any valid votes previously not tabulated.

### Requested Recounts

A recount may be requested by an officer of a political party, a candidate of the office, or a group of five or more registered voters for any question or issue.

The request for a recount must be done in writing and filed within three business days after the certification. The request must state whether the recount will be done by hand or by the vote tally system and whether all ballots or selected precincts are to be recounted.

A deposit is required at the time of the request of .15 cents per ballot to be recounted by vote tally system or .25 cents per ballot for a hand recount or as determined by the canvassing board. The requester must pay the actual cost of the recount unless the recount changes the results of the election. In that case, the deposit is refunded.

### Election Results Ending in a Tie

Whenever there is a tie between candidates, a mandatory recount will be conducted. If the race is still tied after the recount, the winner is decided by lot by the appropriate filing officer. “By lot” may be a flipping of a coin, drawing a number, or something similar.

# Ballot Path

## Mailing of Ballots

Ballots must be available at the County Auditor's Office- Election Division at least 18 days before an election. Ballots must be mailed to voters at least 18 days prior to an election. Military and overseas ballots must be mailed 45 days prior to a general or primary election, 30 days before a special election.

## Securing the Ballots

Beginning with the receipt of the ballots, all voted ballots are kept in secure storage when not being directly processed. Secure storage includes the use of numbered seals and seal logs or other methods that enable detection of any inappropriate access to the secured materials.

## Ballot processing

**Voted Ballots Received in Secured Ballot Box locations:** Two employees from the Auditor's Office will open and empty the box each morning using the seal log. Ballots are incorporated into the daily returns. Election night at 8:00 p.m. the box is placed in secure storage. No voter is permitted to place a ballot in the box after 8:00 p.m. election night.

**Received by mail:** Two employees from the Auditor's Office pick up returned ballots from the post office on a daily basis. Time of day is approximately 8:30 a.m.

Two employees from the Auditor's Office will open and empty drop boxes as needed depending on volume, using the seal log. Ballots are incorporated into the daily returns. At 8:00 p.m. election night, two staff will declare the election is closed and close the slot on the box so no other ballots can be deposited. Two employees will empty the box that night, or the next day. Those ballots will be incorporated into Wednesday's daily returns.

## Daily Processing of Returned Ballots:

1. Ballots are scanned as *received*.
2. Signatures are verified against the voter's record and *accepted* if the signature matches.
  - a. Ballots received after Election Day are checked for a valid postmark before processing. Ballots without a valid postmark are entered as challenged for record keeping only and not processed any further. Letters are sent to voters challenged as Post Mark Too Late.
3. Ballots returned in a manner not qualified to be entered as received for processing are forwarded to the proper personnel for follow-up.
4. After signature verification and data entry are complete, the number of ballots accepted is verified with the number on a report generated by our Election Management System (EMS). This report is initialed by staff as balancing.



**Ballots Returned and flagged as “Challenged”:**

Some reasons a ballot is challenged:

- The voter did not sign the declaration;
- The signature on the declaration does not appear to match the signature on the voter’s record;
- The declaration was signed by a Power of Attorney;

Challenged ballots are stored in the secure storage area in the Election Processing Center. When challenged ballots are resolved by the voter, the return status code is changed from challenged to good and the ballot goes to the next step for processing.

**Ballots Returned “Undeliverable”:** Ballots returned as undeliverable are used for file maintenance after the election is certified and reported on the canvassing report.

**Pre-Inspection of Ballots:** Pre-Inspection on all good returned ballots begins after the opening process.

**Ballot Resolution and Duplication:** Ballots, which are damaged or not readable by the tabulator, may be duplicated or resolved when the intent of the voter’s marks on a ballot is clear. A voter’s intent is determined by guidelines provided by the Secretary of State in the “Statewide Standards of What is a Vote”.

The guide is available at <http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections>.

Ballots are only resolved by teams comprised of two employees from the Elections Division. The process of ballot resolution is the selecting or deselecting of votes according to voter intent electronically. This procedure is visible on the display in the elections center.

**Ballots Scanning:** Scanning takes place during the entire process. Our system is unique in that it does not count votes while scanning.

**Tabulation:** This can be done no earlier than 8:00 p.m. election night. This is what will produce the results in a readable report.

**Storing Counted Ballots:** Counted Ballots remain in a secure location from the time they are scanned up to five (5) days after certification. If it is necessary to access the tabulated ballots during canvassing and prior to certification, two auditor's staff will fill out the seal logs using red ink indicating the reason for accessing those ballots.

**Ballot Reconciliation:** Ballot totals are reconciled after each ballot count and verified during canvassing. Staff must verify that the number of ballots returned equals the number of persons receiving credit. The Ballot Reconciliation Report becomes part of the Official Canvass for all Elections to be submitted to the Office of the Secretary of State.

**Ballot Retention:** All ballots will be transferred to the county record manager and destroyed no earlier than 60 days **after certification** for a non-federal election and 22 months **after date of election** for a federal election.

# Glossary

**Accessible Voting Unit (AVU)** - A touch screen or other device, which allows disabled voters to vote without assistance.

**Ballot Duplication** - The process of making an exact copy of a ballot to make sure it will be counted correctly by the ballot counting system.

**Ballot Counter** - A machine that tabulates votes in a readable format. Also known as a vote tallying system or ballot tabulator.

**Ballot Inspection** - Each ballot must be inspected for mistakes or damage that would prevent the votes to be counted correctly.

**Ballot Resolution** - In a county using a digital scan system, resolving ballots is the equivalent of duplicating ballots. Resolving a digitally scanned copy of a ballot is done to permit a vote to be counted as the voter intended.

**Canvass** - Final determination of questionable ballots by the County Canvassing Board.

**Canvassing Board** - The Board is made up of the County Auditor, County Prosecuting Attorney, and the chair of the County Commissioners or County Council.

**Counting Center** - The location in a county where ballots are processed and counted.

**Election Observer** - Official observer appointed by one of the major political parties. An official observer may not be an election worker hired to process.

**Logic and Accuracy** - An official test to verify that the ballot counter and programming correctly counts each style of ballot and produces cumulative totals.

**Major Political Party** - A political party is designated as a major party if one of its nominees received more than 5 percent of the total votes cast for President, United States Senator, or a statewide office in a general election in an even numbered year.

**Opening Boards** – Team of two people who open the ballot envelopes, separate the security envelope from the return envelope, inspect accepted ballots for clarity, and prepare them for scanning.

**Overvote** - More than the allowable number of votes cast for any one race or measure by a voter on a ballot.

**Provisional ballots** - A ballot issued when the voter's name is not on the voter list, was sent a ballot, or any other reason when a voter cannot vote a regular ballot.

**Recount** - The process for retabulating the votes for a specific office or issue on all valid ballots cast in a Primary or election.

**Secure Storage** - Employs the use of numbered seals and logs or any other security measures, which will detect inappropriate access to secured materials.

**Tabulate** - To total votes in a readable format.

**Undervote** - A race or measure with no vote cast by a voter on a valid ballot. Also known as a “blank” vote.

**UOCAVA** - Acronym for the Federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.