



**Secretary of State
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STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Uniform Vote Counting Standards

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California Secretary of State Uniform Vote Counting Standards

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Section I Introduction

Pursuant to Section 301 (a)(6) of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, the Secretary of State has developed these standards to define the circumstances under which “marking” of a ballot constitutes a vote and when a vote will or will not count for each category of voting system certified and in use in California.

Section II Definitions

The following are practical definitions as used herein and are not the definitions provided in the California Elections Code or federal law/HAVA, but are nonetheless consistent with state and federal law.

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| Blank Ballot | A blank ballot is one on which the voter has made no marks in any voting position target, or one which has been marked with an unreadable marker, or one which has been consistently marked outside of the “read” area of the scanner. |
| Candidate | A candidate is a person who is seeking nomination or election to a specified office and who either has met the legal requirements to have his/her name printed on the ballot or is eligible to have his/her name written in on the ballot and counted as the voter’s choice for the contest. |
| Damaged Ballot | A damaged ballot is one that has been torn, bent, or otherwise mutilated or rendered unreadable such that it cannot be processed by the ballot tabulating equipment designed for use with the ballot. |
| Duplicated Ballot | A duplicated ballot is a ballot which is a true copy of the originally cast ballot. It is created when damage, improper marking or some other action/defect prevents the original ballot from being read by a ballot tabulating machine, and is used to properly process and count the votes originally cast by the voter. (Elections Code section 15210 provides the method by which a duplicate ballot must be created.) |
| Listed Candidate | A listed candidate is a candidate whose name appears on the ballot at the time the voter received the ballot, as opposed to a write-in candidate. |
| Measure | A measure is a ballot proposition, which appears on a ballot and requires voter action in order to enact or reject a proposed law. |
| Overvote | An overvote occurs when a voter marks more than the maximum number of voting position targets allowed in the contest. |
| Punch Card Ballot | A punch card ballot is a ballot card that contains voting position targets that a marking device must pierce to form a hole in order to record a voter’s choice for a candidate or measure. |
| Undervote | An undervote occurs when a voter marks less than the maximum number of voting position targets allowed in a contest. |
| Voting Position Target | A voting position target refers to that area of the ballot adjacent to each candidate or measure, or that area of the ballot, specifically designated to record the voter’s choice for that contest. The term applies to all types of voting position targets on ballots, regardless of what form they may take, including, but not limited to, rectangle, oval, circle, square, hole punch, cross punch, slotting and open arrow. |

Section III General Standards

The following general standards shall apply in the counting of all ballots and votes, regardless of the voting system used, for both the initial count and for any recount.

- A.** A ballot that is not marked as provided by law must be segregated and counted in the manner directed by the elections official. Any ballot that contains personal information as defined in section 14287, or that is torn, bent, or mutilated shall be segregated as directed by the elections official and a duplicate ballot shall be prepared pursuant to section 15210. "Personal information" includes: the signature of the voter, the initials, name or address of the voter, a voter identification number, a social security number, or a driver's license number. A ballot that contains marks or markings not related to an indication of the vote choice for a contest and that are not personal information shall be counted. Duplication is not required unless the ballot contains personal information, or the condition of the ballot or markings on the ballot interfere with the ability of the vote tabulation equipment to tally the ballot. (Elections Code sections 13204, 14287, 15154, and 15208.)
- B.** A vote for any candidate or ballot measure shall not be rejected solely because the voter failed to follow instructions for marking the ballot. If, for any reason, it is impossible to determine the choice of the voter for any candidate or ballot measure, the vote for that candidate or ballot measure shall be considered void. (Elections Code section 15154.)
- C.** A mark is considered valid when it is clear that it represents the voter's choice and is the technique consistently used by the voter to indicate his or her selections. Such marks may include, but are not limited to, properly filled-in voting position targets, checkmarks, X's, circles, completed arrows, or any other clear indication of the voter's choice, such as the word "yes" next to a candidate's name or a voting position target for a ballot measure.
Conversely, a mark crossed out by the voter, or the word "no" next to a candidate's name or a voting position target for a ballot measure shall not be considered to be a valid vote but will, instead, be deemed an indication that the voter did not choose to cast a vote for that candidate or measure.
- D.** In determining the validity of a partially filled-in voting position target, the consistency of a voter's marks on the entire ballot shall be taken into consideration. A "hesitation mark" such as a dot in the voting position target shall not be considered a valid mark unless it is demonstrated that the voter consistently marked his or her ballot in such a manner.
- E.** If a contest is marked with more choices than there are offices to be filled or measures that may prevail, the vote shall not be counted for that contest, but shall be counted in all other contests in which there is no overvote and the voter's choice can be clearly determined. (Elections Code section 15154.)
- F.** If a contest is marked with fewer choices than there are offices to be filled or measures that may prevail, the vote choice(s) for all otherwise properly marked candidates or measures shall be counted.
- G.** Write-in votes are counted pursuant to the provisions established in Elections Code sections 14420, 15342 and 15342.5.

Section IV Mark Sense (Optical Scan) Voting Systems

When optical scan technology is used to count the votes on a ballot, the provisions of this section shall apply.

The following standards shall be used to determine whether there is a clear indication on the ballot that the voter has made a definite choice. The examples used in this section refer to

the “voting position target” as defined in Section II of this document. The same principles demonstrated in the examples below shall apply to all types of voting position targets on optical scan ballots, regardless of what form they may take (e.g. rectangle, oval, circle, square, hole punch, cross punch, slotting, open arrow).

A. Standards Indicating a Valid Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered a valid vote, if the:

1. Voter indicates vote choice by consistently filling inside the entire voting position target.
2. Voter indicates vote choice by consistently filling in less than the entire voting position target for all vote choices on the ballot and the ballot is processed in a manner consistent with the use procedures provided and approved for the voting system.
3. Voter indicates vote choice by consistently placing a distinctive mark, such as (X) or (✓) or (←), inside the associated voting position target for a candidate choice or ballot measure.
4. Voter indicates vote choice by consistently placing a distinctive mark, such as (X) or (✓) or (←), in the corresponding space directly above, below or beside the associated voting position target for a candidate or ballot measure.
5. Voter marks vote choices by encircling the entire voting position target for a candidate or ballot measure.
6. Voter indicates voting error correction by using correction tape, strikeover, white-out or generic written note of instruction and marks another vote choice for the same contest on the ballot.
7. Voter writes in a qualified write-in candidate's name, or a reasonable facsimile of the spelling of the name, in the designated write-in spaces directly below the list of candidates for that office and marks the associated write-in voting target position.
8. Voter writes in a listed candidate's name in the designated write-in space and marks the associated write-in voting target position. In such cases, the vote shall be counted as a single vote for the listed candidate.
9. Voter marks a voting target position for a listed candidate and also enters the listed candidate's name in the designated candidate write-in space. In such cases, the vote shall be counted as a single vote for the listed candidate.
10. Voter writes in qualified write-in candidate's name, or a reasonable facsimile of the spelling of the name, on the secrecy sleeve envelope or stub and indicates the contest for which the vote is being cast, in the case of voting systems where write-in spaces appear separately from the list of candidates for an office and do not provide voting position targets.

B. Standards Indicating an Invalid Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered an invalid vote, if the:

1. Voter uses random markings, indentations, punctures or impressions, squiggly/dimpled or crimp marks, pinholes or pinpricks on a ballot, and there is no distinctive and consistent voting pattern to clearly indicate voter choice(s).
2. Voter indicates vote choice by filling in less than the entire voting position target, and the voter has not consistently marked the entire ballot in the same manner, making voter's choice unclear.

3. Voter inconsistently places a mark above, below or beside the associated voting position target on a ballot, instead of inside the voting position target, and voter's choice cannot be clearly determined.
4. Voter writes in the name of a person who has not qualified as a write-in candidate.
5. Voter writes in a listed candidate's name in the designated write-in space and fills in the associated voting position target for a different listed candidate in the same contest. (Elections Code section 15154(c) and (d).)
6. Voter writes in a candidate name that is unrecognizable/undecipherable and it cannot be determined for whom the vote is intended to be cast.
7. Voter writes in a qualified write-in candidate's name in the designated write-in space and does not fill in the associated voting position target for the write-in candidate. However, in the event of a manual recount, pursuant to Elections Code section 15342.5 if the intent of the voter can be determined, the vote shall be counted regardless of whether the voter has filled in the associated voting position target for the write-in candidate.
8. Voter uses pressure-sensitive stickers, rubber stamps, glued stamps, or any other device not provided for in the voting procedures for the voting systems approved by the Secretary of State to indicate the name of the voter's choice for a write-in candidate.

C. Abandoned Ballot

If a voter leaves the voting booth without casting the ballot, the precinct official shall cause the ballot to be cast without examining the ballot.

Section V Punch Card Voting Systems

When a card reader is used to count the votes cast on a punch card ballot, the provisions of this section shall apply. The following standards shall be used to determine whether the voter has made a definite choice.

A. Standards Indicating a Valid Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered a valid vote, if the:

1. Vote cast on a lever-type punch card voting machine (Datavote) is cast by a voter either operating the lever adjacent to the name of the candidate or measure for which the voter chooses to vote or by writing in the name of a qualified write-in candidate in accordance with the ballot instructions and then recording such votes on the machine by the actuation of the main lever.
2. Punch card ballot is initially processed by a card reader and stops the card reader from counting it or proceeding, is able to be inspected and processed in accordance with the standards of Section IV Mark Sense (Optical Scan) Voting Systems.

B. Standards Indicating an Invalid Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered an invalid vote, if the:

1. Voter uses random markings, indentations, punctures or impressions, squiggly/dimpled or crimp marks, pinholes or pinpricks on a ballot, and there is no distinctive and consistent voting pattern to clearly indicate voter's choice.
2. Voter writes in the name of a person who has not qualified as a write-in candidate.
3. Voter writes in a listed candidate's name in the designated write-in space and

punches the associated voting position target for a different listed candidate in the same contest.

4. Voter writes in the name of a candidate whose name cannot be deciphered. This invalidates only the contest for which the name has been written; all remaining valid votes shall be counted.
5. Voter writes in a qualified write-in candidate's name in the designated write-in space and does not punch the associated voting position target for the write-in candidate. However, in the event of a manual recount, pursuant to Elections Code section 15342.5 if the intent of the voter can be determined, the vote shall be counted regardless of whether the voter has filled in the associated voting position target for the write-in candidate.
6. Voter uses pressure-sensitive stickers, rubber stamps, glued stamps, or any other device not provided for in the voting procedures for the voting systems approved by the Secretary of State to indicate the name of the voter's choice for a write-in candidate.

C. Abandoned Ballot

If a voter leaves the voting booth without casting the ballot, the precinct official shall cause the ballot to be cast without examining the ballot.

Section VI Other Paper Voting Systems

A paper ballot shall be subject to the standards in the section applicable to the system on which it is processed (e.g., optical scan or punch card voting system).

When paper ballots, or voting responses on paper other than a ballot, are counted by the hand and eye, the provisions of Section IV Optical Scan Voting Systems shall apply.

Section VII Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) Voting Systems

When DRE technology is used to cast and count the votes on a ballot, the provisions of this section shall apply. The following standards shall be used to determine whether the voter has made a definite choice.

A. Standards Indicating a Valid Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered a valid vote, if the:

1. Voter operates the DRE in a manner to cause an "X" or "✓" or "highlight" or similar designation to display in the voting target position of the name of the candidate or measure for which the voter chooses to vote, followed by the voter activating the cast vote indicator.
2. Voter operates the DRE in a manner to cause the name of a qualified write-in candidate to be entered in the designated write-in space, followed by the voter activating the cast vote indicator.
3. Voter operates the DRE in a manner to cause the name of a candidate listed on the ballot to be entered in the designated write-in space, followed by the voter activating the cast vote indicator.
4. Voter operates the DRE in a manner to cause the cast ballot indicator to be activated and has not voted for more contests or candidates than the number for which the voter is eligible to vote.

Note: DRE systems prevent the casting of an invalid vote.

B. Abandoned Ballot

If a voter leaves the voting booth without causing the ballot to be cast, the precinct official shall cause the ballot to be cast, without examining how any votes have been recorded on the machine.

Section VIII Vote-by-Mail Voting Systems

A vote-by-mail ballot shall be subject to the standards provided in the approved use procedures for the system on which it is processed and the provisions of the Elections Code. In addition, the following standards shall also apply.

A. Standards for Valid Vote-by-Mail Ballots

A voter's choice shall be considered a valid vote, if the:

1. Voter's signature on the returned vote-by-mail identification envelope compares with the signature on the affidavit of registration pursuant to Elections Code sections 3011 and 3019. If the elections official has compared the signature on the voter's application with the affidavit pursuant to Elections Code section 3009, the application may be used rather than the affidavit of registration to make the signature comparison.
2. Damaged, torn or otherwise non-processable ballot can be duplicated to exactly reflect the voter's choices and thereby enable the ballot to be processed on the system provided for that purpose. Standards for duplicating ballots are set forth in Elections Code section 15210 and in the voting system use procedures.
3. Voter prints name on the signature portion of the vote-by-mail ballot envelope, and it compares with the printed signature on the signature portion of the affidavit of registration. If the elections official has compared the signature on the voter's application with the affidavit pursuant to Elections Code section 3009, the application may be used rather than the affidavit of registration to make the signature comparison.
4. Voter uses a variation of the signature appearing on the affidavit of voter registration caused by the substitution of initials for the first or middle name, or both, and the signature compares with that on the affidavit of registration. If the elections official has compared the signature on the voter's application with the affidavit pursuant to Elections Code section 3009, the application may be used rather than the affidavit of registration to make the signature comparison.
5. Voter does not sign the vote-by-mail ballot envelope in the appropriate space, but the signature does appear elsewhere on the envelope and compares with the signature on the affidavit of registration. If the elections official has compared the signature on the voter's application with the affidavit pursuant to Elections Code section 3009, the application may be used rather than the affidavit of registration to make the signature comparison.
6. Voter uses a mark on both the vote-by-mail ballot envelope and the affidavit of voter registration, and the mark compares.
7. Vote-by-mail ballot is postmarked or date stamped on or before Election Day by a bona fide private mail delivery service and received by the elections official no later than three days after Election Day in accordance with Elections Code section 3020.
8. Vote-by-mail ballot has no dated postmark, the postmark is illegible, and there is no date stamp for receipt from a bona fide private mail delivery service, but the ballot return envelope indicates that the ballot was executed

on or before Election Day and the ballot was received by the elections official no later than three days after Election Day in accordance with Elections Code sections 3011 and 3020.

9. Voter indicates vote choice(s) by writing the name(s) of the candidate(s) or indicating the vote(s) on the measure(s) in a letter or note, and returns it in a vote-by-mail envelope with a valid signature. If the voter's choice(s) can be determined, the ballot shall be duplicated to reflect the voter's choices and processed as if cast by the voter. (Elections Code section 15210 provides the method by which a duplicate ballot must be created.)
10. Voter, instead of using his or her official ballot, marks a sample ballot and mails it in the vote-by-mail envelope and the signature on the envelope compares with the signature on the affidavit of registration. If the elections official has compared the signature on the voter's application with the affidavit pursuant to Elections Code section 3009, the application may be used rather than the affidavit of registration to make the signature comparison.
11. Two or more ballots are returned in one vote-by-mail ballot envelope, and there are an equal number of distinct signatures on the envelope that can be attributed to eligible vote-by-mail voters and each of these signatures compares with the affidavits of registration. If the elections official has compared the signature of the voter's application with the affidavit pursuant to Elections Code section 3009, the application may be used rather than the affidavit of registration to make the signature comparison.
12. Voter is a special absentee voter who is temporarily living outside of the territorial limits of the United States or the District of Columbia and transmits a voted ballot by facsimile and the ballot is submitted consistent with the provisions of Elections Code section 3011.

B. Standards for Invalid Vote-by-Mail Ballots

A voter's choice shall be considered an invalid vote, if the:

1. Vote-by-mail ballot envelope is not signed by the voter and pursuant to California Elections Code 3019 (f) the voter does not cure the ballot by providing the elections official with a signed form by 5 p.m. on the eighth day after the election.
2. Vote-by-mail ballot envelope is signed using power of attorney.
3. Vote-by-mail ballot is not received by the voter's elections official via the United States Postal Service or a bona fide private mail delivery company within three days after Election Day.
4. Vote-by-mail ballot is delivered by USPS or bona fide private mail service to the elections official within three days of Election Day, but the postmark or private mail service date stamp indicates that it was received by the carrier after Election Day.
5. Vote-by-mail ballot is delivered by USPS or bona fide private mail service to the elections official within three days of Election Day without a legible postmark date or date stamp from the private mail service and the ballot return envelope indicates the ballot was executed after Election Day.
6. Vote-by-mail ballot is received by elections official after Election Day by some method other than USPS or bona fide private mail service.
7. Vote-by-mail ballot envelope is returned by a third party who is not eligible or authorized to return the voted ballot on behalf of the absent voter.

8. Voter, who is not a special absentee voter, transmits his or her voted ballot by facsimile.
9. Voter's signature on the vote-by-mail ballot envelope, when compared to the signature on the affidavit of registration, does not appear to be the same.
10. Vote-by-mail ballot return envelope contains two or more voted vote-by-mail ballots but there are less than an equal number of distinct signatures on the vote-by-mail envelope.

Section IX Provisional Ballots

A provisional ballot shall be subject to the standards in the section applicable to the system on which it is processed. In addition to those standards, the following standards shall also apply.

A. Standards for Valid Provisional Ballot and Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered a valid vote, if the:

1. Voter casts a provisional ballot and the voter's eligibility can be confirmed and the voter's choice is clearly marked, the vote shall be counted.
2. Voter casts a provisional ballot for a precinct other than the precinct in which the voter was legally entitled to vote, all votes properly cast in contests for which the voter was legally entitled to vote will be counted. (Elections Code section 14310.)

B. Standards for Invalid Provisional Ballot and Vote

A voter's choice shall be considered an invalid vote, if the:

1. Voter casts a provisional ballot and the voter's eligibility cannot be confirmed, the ballot shall not be counted.
2. Voter casts a provisional ballot for a precinct other than the precinct in which the voter was legally entitled to vote, in which case all votes cast in contests for which the voter was not legally entitled to vote will not be counted. (Elections Code section 14310.)