

The  
Electoral  
Commission

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# The General Election: The journey of your vote

Educators' notes for England



[electoralcommission.org.uk/learning](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/learning)

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



# 01.

## Introduction

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These activities will contribute to students' understanding of democracy by exploring the processes involved in a UK Parliamentary general election.

The activities explore eight steps involved in a general election, introducing students to 'the journey' of their vote.

There are eight activities in total and they can be used in any way that fits your timetable. Feel free to pick one activity or to follow the whole sequence.

The activities focus on the processes involved when someone votes in person.

Students can register to vote from the age of 16 and this activity pack encourages them to do that. For more information about supporting your students to register to vote, please see [electoralcommission.org.uk/learning](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/learning)



# 01.

## Introduction

General election step	Activity type	Resources required
Journey of your vote overview	Timeline sort	Print and cut slide 5 (optional)
<b>Register</b> to vote	Short quiz / students register to vote	Internet access
<b>Inform</b> your vote	Small group discussions	None
<b>Decide</b> how to vote	Video and quiz	The Electoral Commission video: ways to vote Print slide 18 (optional)
<b>Go</b> to the polling station	Video and information sheet	The Electoral Commission video: voter ID
<b>Mark</b> your ballot paper	Class debate	None
<b>Fold</b> your ballot paper	Read and discuss the article	BBC article: the sweet history of the secret ballot box
Your vote will be <b>counted</b>	Class discussion	None
The winning MP will be <b>declared</b>	Individual reflection	None



## 02.

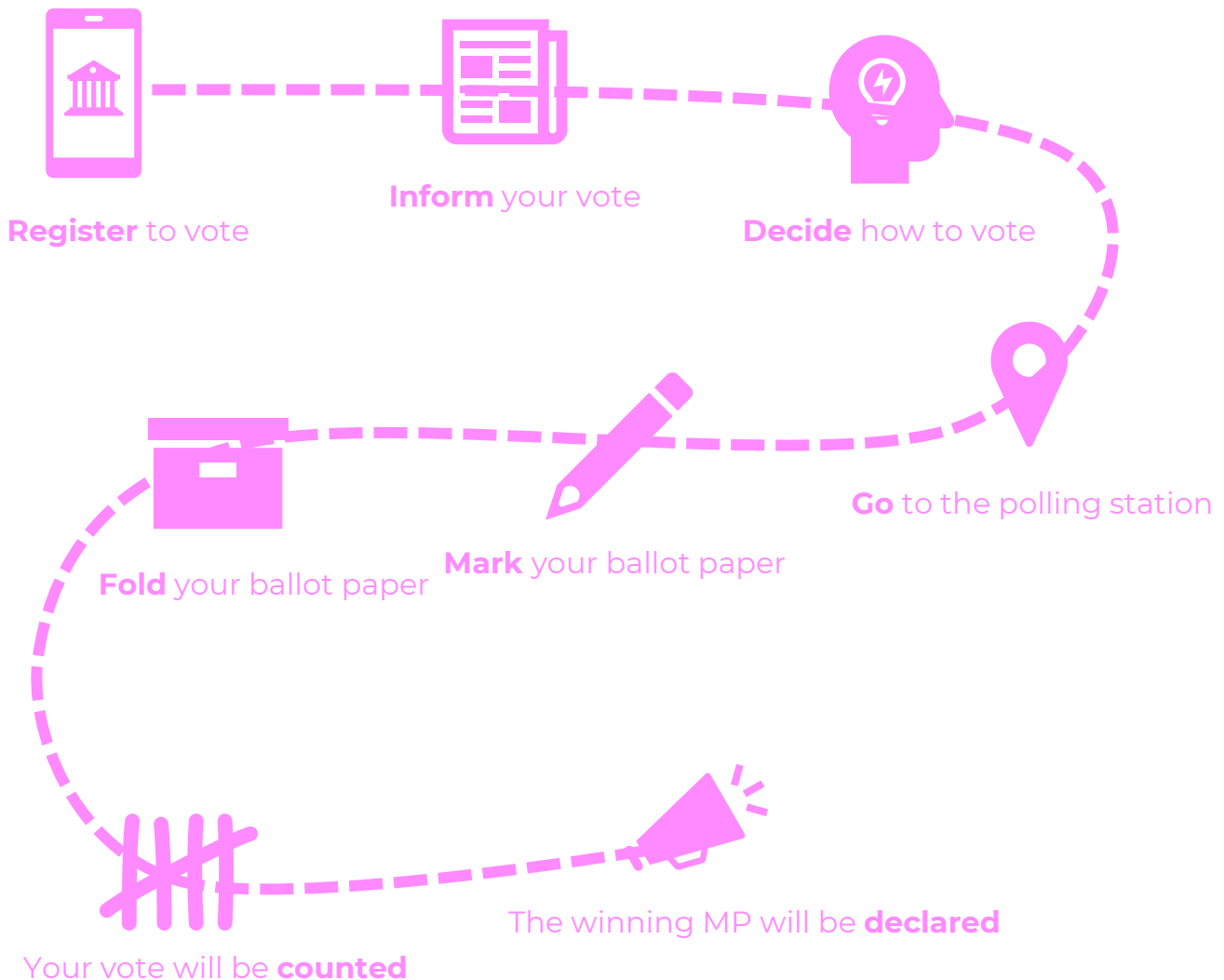
# Journey of your vote

## Activity pack slides 3-6

Start this activity by asking students what is happening on 4 July 2024. Answer: a UK Parliamentary general election.

Find out how much students know about the process of the election.

Introduce the timeline card sort activity. Slide 5 can be printed and cut up for a physical card sort or the class could sort the general election steps into the right order through discussion.



# 03.

## Register to vote

### Activity pack slides 7-11

Introduce the short quiz and encourage students to think about why people might or might not register to vote.

#### Quiz: who is more likely to be registered to vote in England?

##### 1. 18-34 year olds or over 65 year olds?

Answer: in 2022, 70% of 18-34 year olds were registered to vote and 97% of over 65 year olds.

##### 2. Renters or home owners

Answer: in 2022, 66% of renters and 95% of home owners were registered to vote.

#### Challenge questions

- Why might some groups be more likely to register to vote than others?
- What is the impact of not registering to vote?
- Should voter registration be “opt-out” instead of “opt-in”?

You can explore the registration data on the Electoral Commission website at [electoralcommission.org.uk/who-is-registered](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/who-is-registered)

#### Register to vote

Give students access to the internet so they can register to vote at [gov.uk/register tovote](https://gov.uk/register tovote)

You can register to vote if you're 16 or older.

They will need need:

- National Insurance number
- Name and address

Students only need to register if they've:

- never registered before
- changed their name
- moved house



# 04.

## Inform your vote

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### Slides 12-14

Ask students when the general election is happening. How do they know?

Ask them where they have heard information about the election and start to make a list of sources.

Compare the list with the icons on **slide 13**.

Split the class into small groups and have them consider the questions on **slide 14**. The answers might be one or more the information sources in the icon, or something else.

### Challenge questions:

- How do students know the information they see is accurate?
- Why might people want to spread information that is wrong, exaggerated or misleading in relation to an election?



## 05.

# Decide how to vote

## Slides 15-18

Watch the Ways to Vote video [on Youtube](#) or on the slides.

Complete the quiz on slide 18 and discuss the answers as a class.

### Differentiation:

You could print **slide 18** and give students a copy of the quiz.

### Answers:

Question	True	False
Your polling station will close at 2pm		X
You need to bring photo ID with you	X	
You can ask any member of staff for help	X	
To vote by post you need to complete an application	X	
You need to make sure that your postal vote is returned by 8.34am on polling day		X
Someone can vote for you on your behalf but you must fill out an application form	X	
You cannot vote if you are not registered	X	
You must cast your vote in pencil		X



# 06.

## Go to the polling station

### Slides 19-22

Please be aware this activity is most useful for students who will be eligible to vote in the general election.

Ask students if they know what a polling station is and where their polling station is.

Model looking up the information at [electoralcommission.org.uk/voter](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/voter) using your school or college's postcode.

Ask students what they need to take with them to a polling station. Answer: photo ID. Dispel any myths if need be.

Watch the Electoral Commission's video [on Youtube](#) or on the slide, about what forms of ID you can use at a polling station.

Slide 22 provides information about how to apply for a free "Voter Authority Certificate" which students can use if they don't have one of the accepted forms of ID.

Remind students that when they are at a polling station that they can ask for help.

#### **Polling station**

A place where people go to vote



## 07.

# Mark your ballot paper

## Slides 23-30

Explain to students that voting is a way to make your voice heard. The results of general elections usually indicate how the majority of people in the UK feel about big topics.

This activity is a class debate.

### Setting ground rules

Before moving on to the sharing of students' views and opinions, it can be helpful to have a set of rules for discussion to ensure safe, respectful and orderly participation.

This is a suggestion of five rules. Encourage students to agree a sixth question and use your own classroom rules if appropriate.

Remember:

- To be respectful of other views
- Having a free-flowing discussion is great, and it's ok to try and persuade someone to your way of thinking
- Respect the person you're speaking to, and listen to what they have to say too
- It's good to feel passionately about something, but remember to treat people fairly

- Be brave. This is your opportunity to speak up and be heard

Ask students:

- Why is it important to be able to give your opinion?
- How does it feel when your opinion persuades others? How does it feel when it doesn't?

These questions are intended to engage students with the importance and value of having a voice.

Initially students are asked to consider matters they are familiar with, but this is laying the foundations to connect to wider politics and democracy.



## 08.

# Fold your ballot paper

[Read this BBC article by Ros Ball](#) and discuss the questions as a class.

## The sweet history of the secret ballot box

Putting an X on a ballot paper in a private booth and posting it into a box is something you and I take for granted.

But before 1872, the fifth of the adult male population lucky enough to be able to vote had to do so very publicly.

They made their choice by a show of hands, stating their choice out loud, or marking their paper in front of people, often surrounded by cheering onlookers and the agents of the candidates. The answer was written down and the lists or "poll books" could be bought from local newspapers.

This public system of voting had left electors wide open to bribery and intimidation, for example mobs might be brought to polls to bully the voters. In contrast elections could be like a party, where candidates 'rewarded' their voters with large amounts of alcohol.

Despite opposition from those who considered secret voting to be "unmanly" and "un-English", the Ballot Act of 1872 introduced the ballot box to counteract bribing of voters.

Pontefract was the first town to vote in private when its Liberal MP Hugh Childers was newly appointed as a minister and the rules back then meant he had to win a by-election in order to serve.

Much like today, the voters of the Pontefract by-election were provided with separate booths where they could mark their paper in private and post it into the ballot box.

The boxes were specially made for the occasion and were marked with a wax seal to make sure no one tampered with the votes. Charmingly, the seal was made with a traditional liquorice stamp of a castle and an owl from a local factory where they used them to stamp Pontefract cakes.



## 08.

# Fold your ballot paper continued.

Seals on the 1872 ballot box were made with a liquorice stamp from a nearby Pontefract cake factory

Interest in the 1872 by-election was high because there was a suspicion that, now voters were able to make their choice in secret, support for the parties might be drastically different. However when the votes were counted, and the results announced at the Town Hall, Hugh Childers was elected just as expected

Unsurprisingly Childers was among the many people who were impressed with the new ballot boxes, and he was right to be - for once there were no allegations of bribery or corruption and not even that much unruly behaviour.

Observers said they had never seen "a contested election in which less intoxicating liquor was drunk", and that the town was so quiet and orderly that "it hardly seemed like an election" at all.

Article by Ros Ball published at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34987232> on 3 December 2015.

### Discussion questions:

- What were the issues with voting publicly in the past?
- Would you prefer to vote publicly or in secret?
- Do you think the way we vote now will stay the same, or change and how?



## 09.

# Your vote will be counted

## Slides 33-41

The aim of this activity is to put students in the position of the team who count votes.

The slides are intended to look like ballot papers which have been marked. The students must decide whether the ballot paper is valid or not valid, depending on how the

paper has been marked. Encourage discussion in each case about the intention of the voter.

Clicking on each slide will reveal the probable answer. In an election count, the decision is at the discretion of Returning Officer.

**Challenge:** why might someone choose to spoil their ballot paper?

# The winning MP will be declared

## Slides 42-43

If you have completed all the activities, look back at each step in the process. It has all been leading to the moment when the winning MP is declared.

Take this opportunity to look up which MPs are candidates in your area, if you haven't already: [electoralcommission.org.uk/voter](http://electoralcommission.org.uk/voter)

Ask students to imagine they were the winning MP. What three things would they do for the area?

If they need prompts, they could consider key areas such as education, health, infrastructure, and so on.

In the UK general election, the candidate who receives the most votes in your area becomes your MP. The political party with the most MPs will form the UK Government.

