

Election 2019: 10 facts about your vote, your ballot

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Ballots will be mailed by Friday, according to the Kitsap County Auditor's Office. The Kitsap Sun asked Kitsap County Auditor Paul Andrews to demystify the ballot that will arrive in voters' mailboxes later this week and debunk misconceptions voters have about the election process.

1. 'Everyone's vote is important and can make a difference'

Andrews said that since 1992, Kitsap has had three races decided by a single vote, and two races that ended in a tie.

"In the case of the two tied races, the winner was decided by a coin toss," Andrews said. "Everyone's vote is important and can make a difference."

He said some voters think they must vote for every race on the ballot for their votes to count.

"Voters can vote for all races, one race, or no races. It is their choice," Andrews said.

He said if a voter doesn't like any candidate in a race, or doesn't know how to vote on a measure, they don't have to vote on that race at all. They call not voting in a race an "undervote" which is a valid choice and does not slow down ballot processes or invalidate other votes.

2. Myth: 'Nobody really checks my signature.'

Andrews said they actually do.

"Human eyes study and compare the signature on every single ballot envelope to the signature on the voter's registration form," Andrews said. "If it does not match, it is pulled out of process and reviewed a second time where we compare it to every signature we have on file."

Some voters have more than half a dozen signatures on file that they compare it to. If it still does not match any of those, a notice is mailed to the voter that allows them to provide a new signature or resolve the issue by coming to the auditor's office. If there's not a response by three days before certification of the election, the voter will be called.

Missing or mismatched signatures on return envelopes is a big problem the auditor's office has to deal with. It takes time and expensive manpower to fix the issue.

"Approximately 7% of all returned ballot envelopes come in with a missing or mismatched signature," Andrews said. That's about 12,000 ballots in a general election. "These ballot envelopes have to be pulled out of the automated process and handled manually."

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3. What does the secrecy sleeve do?

The secrecy sleeve was created to ensure secrecy of each vote, Andrews said. Putting the ballot in the sleeve prevents it from being able to be read through the sealed return envelope and protects the secrecy of the vote during the process when the sleeve is removed and separated from the return envelope.

More: Local Voters' Pamphlet (<https://www.kitsapgov.com/auditor/Documents/LVP.pdf>)

4. What's the barcode for?

There are three barcodes on every ballot. Andrews said none identify the voter.

One barcode identifies the election, another identifies the precinct and determines which precinct-related races belong on that ballot, and the other is a unique identifier that ensures no ballot is scanned twice.

5. How can voters be assured that their ballot gets there in time?

Voters should drop it in any of the [22 dropbox locations](https://www.kitsapgov.com/auditor/Pages/kitsap-county-voting-locations.aspx) before 8 p.m. on Election Day, which is Nov. 5. It can also be brought to the auditor's office during business hours leading up to Election Day or to a voting center from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Andrews said another good way is to vote and mail back the ballot as soon as it is received.

"We always encourage voters using the mail to mail their ballots in early because Washington law says that the ballot must have a postmark no later than the day of election," Andrews said. "We have heard from voters that dropped their ballots in the mail days before Election Day only for it to arrive at the auditor's office with a late postmark."

In February, a snowstorm caused some problems with the mail system, in some cases delaying mail pick-up and delivery for over a week.

6. Why you shouldn't write-in a joke candidate

Using the "write-in" field for non-qualified candidates and jokes, like Mickey Mouse or Homer Simpson, is no joke, Andrews said.

"Our system identifies that a 'write-in' was selected, which requires us to physically validate the ballot to clear the non-candidate," Andrews said. "This slows down our ability to process ballots, taking longer to get to a final vote count."

It also increases labor costs. Andrews said the only time a voter should write in a candidate is when there's a "qualified" write-in, meaning they've officially filed as a write-in candidate.

7. Other things that can delay processing a ballot

Voters sometimes will put two ballots in one envelope, Andrews said. It causes problems because only one voter has signed the return envelope and will have their vote counted.

Voters also don't follow instructions printed on the ballot. Andrews said this is another thing that slows down the process. He said there has been an improvement in recent years, but some voters still use a pencil or light-colored pens. Only blue or black ink should be used.

Some voters will circle or underline the candidate's name rather than filling in the box as directed. Andrews said these votes are still valid and will be counted but requires additional processing time for the ballot.

8. Newly registered? Auditor's Office increasing its outreach to you

Washington residents can now register to vote when they go to a state Department of Licensing office. It's also possible to register to vote the day of the election. The auditor's office is increasing its outreach footprint, Andrews said, by utilizing social media, partnering with non-partisan community groups, and attending public events like the county fair to encourage Kitsap residents to register and vote.

"We are also hiring and training additional election workers in preparation for increased activity and we are utilizing voter registration kiosks in our lobby and vote centers," Andrews said.

9. Not registered? Here's what you need to do

To register to vote in Washington, you must be:

- A citizen of the United States
- A legal resident of the state of Washington
- 18 years of age by the next election
- Not under the authority of the Department of Corrections for a Washington felony conviction
- Not disqualified from voting due to a court order

People can register to vote at the auditor's office until 8 p.m. on Election Day. It is located at 619 Division St., Port Orchard, WA 98366. Auditor's Office hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. Friday, 7 a.m.- 8 p.m. Election Day.

They can also register at Poulsbo Vote Center at the Olympic College Poulsbo Campus on Election Day only. It is located at 1000 Olympic College Way, Poulsbo, WA 98370. Hours are 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Election Day only.

10. Turning in your ballot

You may mail your voted ballot or deposit it in a ballot drop box as early as the day you receive it.

Mail your ballot early enough to ensure it is postmarked by Election Day.

Ballots received by Monday, Nov. 4, will be included in the first count of ballots on Election Day.

If you don't have your ballot by Oct. 25, contact auditor@co.kitsap.wa.us, or call 360-337-7128.

More: [Election 2019: High interest draws crowded field in South Kitsap board races \(/story/news/local/2019/10/13/high-interest-south-kitsap-school-board-posts/3935944002/\)](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/10/13/high-interest-south-kitsap-school-board-posts/3935944002/)

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