Understanding Your Ballot: A Quick Guide for Voters

Your vote has power. Voting is how you help choose the people who make decisions for your town, state, and country.

Understanding what you can vote on can help you make choices that match your beliefs and hopes for your community.

Your first step:
Only registered voters can vote in their federal, state, and local elections. Make sure you are registered at **thearc.org/registertovote.**

Before you vote, it helps to know what will be on your ballot.

Your ballot is the paper or screen that shows what you can vote on. It may include:

- People running for office, like:
  - President.
  - Senators.
  - Representatives.
  - School board members.
- Questions about rules for your state or town.
- School or city issues, like money for parks, buildings or services.

Knowing what is on your ballot before you vote helps you:

- Feel calm and ready.
- Make choices that match your values.
- Understand how your vote affects your community.

A **sample ballot** shows everything you will see on the real ballot. You can use it to learn what you will vote on ahead of time so everything feels familiar when you actually vote.

You can get a sample ballot by:

- Checking your election office website or contacting them directly. Find your office at **usa.gov/state-election-office**.
- Visiting **vote411.org/ballot** (usually posted two months before the election).

You can take your sample ballot with you when you vote. This can help you remember your choices. Some states do not allow you to use cell phones in a voting area. But you can take a paper sample ballot with you in most states.

Tips for Understanding Your Ballot

Once you have your ballot, take time to learn what each part means.

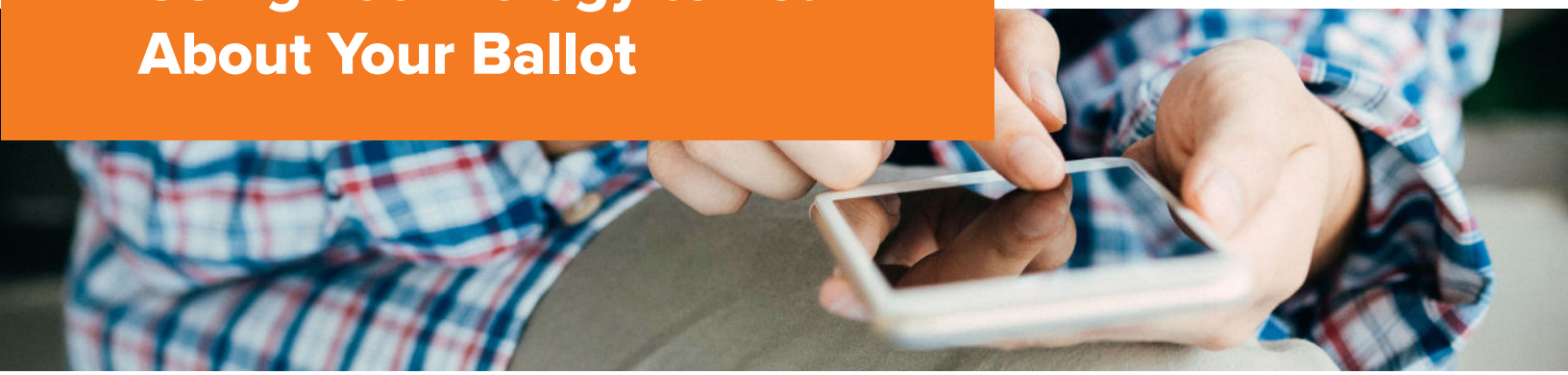
- **Look at your ballot early.** This can help you feel less rushed when voting.
- **Ask questions if something is confusing.** Ballot questions can be long or hard to read. Ask a trusted person to explain it to you in simple words. You do not have to vote the same way they do.
- **Look up the candidates and issues.** You can look at candidate websites, watch news or debates, or visit trusted sites like **factcheck.org**, which does not take sides.
- **Learn how to mark your ballot.** You have the right to get help from your own assistant or an election officer. You have the right to be shown how to mark and cast your ballot. If you have a disability, you can ask to use an accessible voting machine.

Things to Remember While Voting

Look at the sample ballot you completed ahead of time if you have it with you.

- You do not have to vote on every item if you do not want to.
- You can ask an election worker or someone you trust to:
    - Read what is written on your ballot.
    - Help you mark your ballot.
    - Help you use a voting machine.
    - **They should not tell you who or what to vote for.**

Using Technology to Learn About Your Ballot



People learn about what is on their ballot in many ways, like:

- Voter guides.
- Election offices.
- Trusted people or groups.

Some people also use technology, including AI (artificial intelligence), to learn about their ballot.

Below are some benefits and risks of using AI to learn about your ballot.

You do not have to use AI. It is just one of many technology tools.

AI may help:

- Explain what different jobs do (like mayor or school board).
- Give simple summaries of issues.
- Explain complicated ideas in simple words or plain language.
- Show different sides of an issue.

Keep in mind:

- AI may use information that is not correct.
- AI may not know your local voting rules or what is on your ballot.
- AI may try to tell you how to vote, but it is always your decision.
- Never share personal information like your name, address, ID or driver's license, Social Security number, or how you plan to vote.

Here are tips if you choose to use AI:

Copy an item from your sample ballot into an AI tool.

Ask simple questions like:

- *"What does this ballot measure mean?"*
- *"Can you explain this in simple language?"*
- *"What does a mayor do?"*
- *"What is this asking me to decide?"*
- *"What would change if this ballot measure passes? If it does not pass?"*

Ask the AI to show you where it got information.

- *"What source did you use?"*
- *"Can you share a link to your source?"*
- *"Does this source support a political party or candidate?"*

Always double check the information with:

- Your election office.
- Voter guides.
- Trusted friends, family, or groups.

Do not rely only on AI to make your decision.

Technology can help you, but you make all final decisions.

This free and nonpartisan voting resource is made possible through the collaboration of:

More information is available at:
thearc.org/registertovote

The Arc

votethespectrum.org

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