

2026 ELECTION
GUIDE



**THE BALLOT
JUDGE**



Ballot Judge

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Disclaimer: This guide does not cover all election duties and responsibilities. Election Administrators and Election Judges are obligated to follow Montana law.

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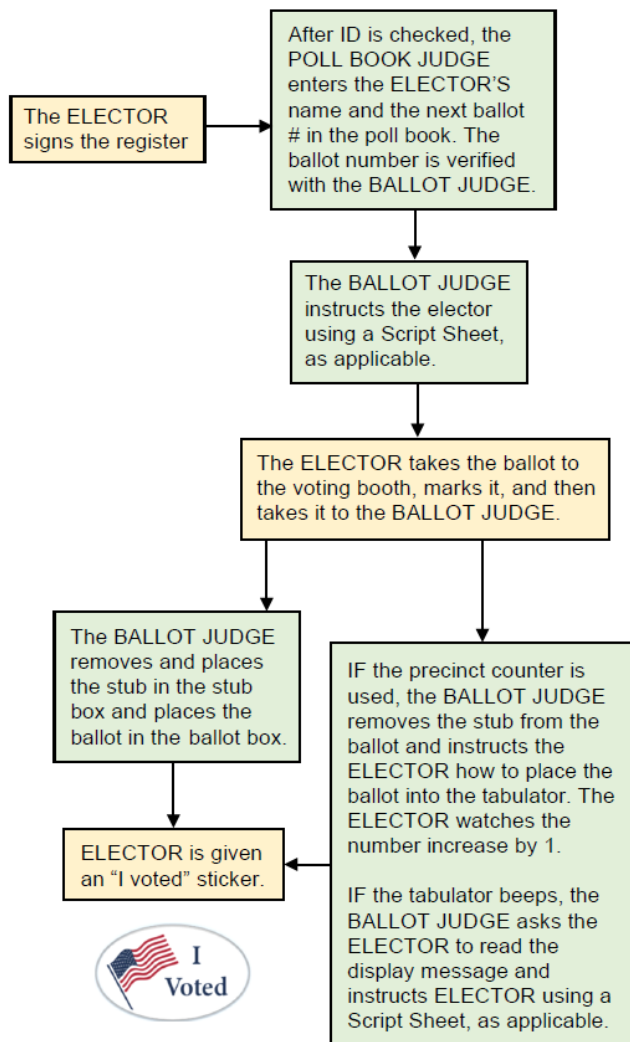
The Ballot Judge

There are few roles as critical to our democracy as the job of an election judge. On election day, a citizen’s right to cast a ballot and have the vote count rests in the hands of the election judge.



The Ballot Judge issues ballots to electors in sequential order, providing the ballot numbers to the Poll Book Judge.

The Ballot Judge demonstrates to the elector the procedure for marking the ballot, placing the voted ballot into the secrecy sleeve, and returning the voted ballot to the appropriate judge.



When the elector returns the ballot, the stub is removed and placed in the stub box. The voted ballot is placed into the ballot box in a manner that ensures no part of the voted ballot is visible.

Note: In a *primary election*, the elector is given one ballot for each Party.

- ✓ The stub numbers on each Party’s ballot must match.
- ✓ The elector is instructed to vote only one Party’s ballot.
- ✓ The voted ballot and all unvoted party ballots are returned to the Ballot Judge.

Unvoted ballots will be placed in the stub box or in the unvoted ballot box, depending on the polling place setup or as directed by the Election Administrator.


Missing or Blank Ballots

If the next sequential ballot is missing, the Poll Book Judge must note this by writing “**missing**” next to the number in the poll book.

If the ballot is missing a number due to misprint, the Ballot Judge will fold and place the ballot in a “**spoiled**” ballot envelope. The envelope is then placed in the ballot box with the stub attached. The Ballot Judge will verify the next ballot has the correct sequential number. If not, repeat these steps for the next ballot.

Elector Asks About Write-in Candidates

The Election Administrator will provide the Chief Election Judge at each precinct a list of declared write-in candidates along with copies of the filing form with name variations. The list may be shown to any elector who requests the information.

 **Note:** Lists *may not* be posted in the polling place or in a voting booth.


The Election Administrator will also provide copies of filing forms listing name variations to ballot tabulating judges.

Spoiled Ballots

([13-13-117, MCA](#))

If an elector spoils or damages their ballot, a new ballot must be provided to the elector upon request. There is no limit to the number of ballots an elector can receive to replace spoiled ballots. ([13-13-117\(1\)\(b\), MCA](#))

- The elector should return the spoiled ballot enclosed in the secrecy sleeve, or folded with the stub showing, to the Ballot Judge.
- The Ballot Judge will instruct the elector to write “**spoiled**” on the ballot and then, without violating the secrecy of the ballot, the ballot judge will write “**spoiled**” on the stub of the spoiled ballot. The Ballot Judge will remove the stub and place it in the stub box.

 **Note:** In a partisan *primary election*, the Ballot Judge will write “**spoiled**” on the stubs of each party ballot for the election, remove them, and place them in the stub box. Voted spoiled ballots are deposited in the “**spoiled**” envelope in the ballot box or stub box as directed by the Election Administrator. Unvoted spoiled ballot(s) are deposited in the box for unvoted ballots. A new set of party ballots is then issued.

- The elector will place the spoiled ballot in an envelope marked “**spoiled.**”
- ! ***Note:** Election judges should not place the ballot in the spoiled ballot envelope due to the possibility of the loss of secrecy of the ballot.*
- The Ballot Judge will instruct the Poll Book Judge to mark the poll book accordingly for the spoiled ballot. The word “**spoiled**” must be noted beside the elector’s name for that ballot number in the poll book.
- The Ballot Judge will give the elector a new ballot and announce the new ballot number to the Poll Book Judge to record in the poll book.
- ! ***Note:** Stickers or labels **may not** be placed by an election judge or elector to cover up or correct errors on the spoiled ballot. A new ballot must be issued.*

POLLING PLACE VOTING FLOW CHART

