

Ballot Review Checklist

These guidelines come from [Questions to ask while designing a ballot](#) and [Field Guides 1 and 2](#)

01

Is the overall appearance visually clear and easy to read?

Start by looking at the overall appearance of the ballot. None of these are critical alone, but if there are many items from this section, it's worth flagging them for general updates.

Source: Field Guide 1: Designing usable ballots

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	NOTES FOR THIS REVIEW
Use lowercase letters	ALL CAPS are harder to read Suggest bold for emphasis.	
Avoid centered text	Centered text is harder to read because the beginning of lines are harder to find. We usually recommend text lined up on the left margin of the column	
Use big enough type	Candidate names should be at least 11 points, preferably 12	
Pick one sans-serif font	A single font provides a unified look. Sans serif fonts don't have the extra strokes that form feet on the letters.	
Support navigation and process	Reminders for how to vote the entire ballot help voters.	
Use clear, simple language	When the ballot looks and sounds complicated, voting seems harder.	
Use accurate instructional illustrations	Accurate visual information is important for people with low literacy and low English proficiency.	
Use informational icons (only)	Any icons should have a functional use in communicating clearly.	
Use contrast and color to support meaning	Shading and other use of color should help voters navigate the ballot, for example by separating contests	
Show what's important	Use layout and text size to show voters what to pay attention to	

02

Is the ballot design consistent, avoiding bias, throughout the ballot?

These are mostly legal requirements to avoid bias.

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	NOTES FOR THIS REVIEW
Are marking targets round or oval?	Square targets are harder to fill in. Connect-the-arrow targets hard to understand or decide how dark to make the connection to count as a vote.	
Do all candidates have the same amount of vertical space?	Requirement to avoid bias	
Are marking targets in a consistent relationship?	Requirement to avoid bias	
Does the ballot avoid clutter?	The more extra information there is on a ballot, if not clearly laid out, the more likely it is that voters will be confused or miss information.	

03

Are contests on the ballot clearly separated from each other, and from instructions?

Many voters find it hard to see the boundaries of a contest. These are some of the most common layout problems.

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	NOTES FOR THIS REVIEW
Are there any split contests?	Splitting the candidates in a contest between columns or pages is the single easiest way to have overvotes	
Are there blank spaces within a contest?	This rarely happens - usually when a candidate is removed from the ballot at the last minute. It also causes overvotes as voters make choices above and below the split.	
Are any contests below instructions in a column?	An undervote magnet, hiding contests "in plain sight"	

04 Is the ballot easy to navigate?

This is about getting around the whole ballot if it's more than one page.
Source: Field Guide 2: Writing instructions voters can understand

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	NOTES FOR THIS REVIEW
Put instructions where voters need them	At the top or left column. This also include instructions about the number of pages to make sure voters see all contests	

05 Do instructions have all the information needed to vote accurately?

Minimalist instructions on the ballot, where voters need them, are important.
Source: Field Guide 2: Writing instructions voters can understand

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	NOTES FOR THIS REVIEW
At the beginning of the ballot, explain how to change a vote, and that voters may write in a candidate.	Complete, but brief, instructions remind all voters of their options while marking a ballot.	
Include information that will prevent voters from making errors	Voters may not be willing to ask for help.	

06 Are instructions written clearly?

Plain language guidance. Problems show a need for helpful “how to” voter ed.
Source: Field Guide 2: Writing instructions voters can understand

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	NOTES FOR THIS REVIEW
Write short sentences Use short, simple everyday words Write in the active voice Write in the positive	Lengthy text, complex words, and passive sentences are all harder to read.	
When giving instructions that are more than one step, make each step an item in a numbered list.	Instructions in block paragraphs are harder to parse out into steps.	
Keep paragraphs short.	Short paragraphs make different information stand out	
Separate paragraphs by a space so each paragraph stands out on the page or screen.	Space makes each piece of information stand out	

07 Does the ballot support language access requirements well?

Any of the guidelines above are more easily broken in bilingual ballots.