

Election Observer Training

June 7, 2023



Mason County Auditor's Office

Elections Department – Vote Center

Steve Duenkel, Mason County Auditor

Marie Stevenson, Election Superintendent

Susan Blankenship, Assistant Election Administrator

Kailey Chappell, Election Technician



Election Observers

Mason County Election staff administer elections with integrity. The staff has value and takes pride in every election.

Observers affirm the integrity of the election by impartially observing various elements of an election, including ballot processing activities.

As an Election Observer, you want to understand the process and rules prior to observing an election. This training will cover:

- Ways you can observe
- The process of conducting an election
- The rules for observers



Two Ways to Observe

Livestream:

The Ballot Processing Room and six ballot drop boxes have security cameras that are livestreamed 24/7 during the voting period.

The video feeds are available at masoncountywaelections.gov

In Person:

Political parties may designate observers to be in the ballot processing room during all phases of the election. We welcome interested citizens as well. Our space is limited to six observers (up to three from each party with consideration of citizens).

You can also observe the ballot drop boxes in person. We suggest you call in advance to find out when approximately we will be at the ballot box where you would like to observe.



Observing Ballot Processing In Person

Observing in person, you must sign in at the kiosk before you can enter the ballot processing room.



All observers must be identified by a badge with your name and party representation. Other citizens will sign in as a visitor. You will receive your badge once inside the Ballot Processing Room. When you leave, please sign out at the kiosk. (This is important in the event of an evacuation or an emergency.)



Upon entering the Ballot Processing Room, you must place your cell phone and any personal items in a locker.

WAC 434-261-020

Election Activities

We are here to help you understand the process of conducting an election, including the testing conducted and the laws and rules that we follow and to protect the integrity of elections.

Logic and Accuracy Test

Security of Ballots and Equipment

Processing Ballots

- Ballot Collection
- Signature Verification
- Opening the Ballots
- Inspection of Ballots
- Ballot Duplication
- Scanning Ballots
- Resolution of Votes
- Tabulation

Auditing the Results

- Random Audit
- Risk Limiting Audit (RLA)
- Review Anomalies

Reconciliation

Canvass of Rejected Ballots

Certification of the Results



Logic and Accuracy Testing

Before ballots are mailed, the tabulation system must be tested to ensure that it will correctly count votes for all candidates and/or measures on the ballot.

The election staff creates a matrix for predetermined results of votes of every race/measure on the ballot.

- Every ballot style, includes ballots from all printing sources (vendor, AVU, VoteWA.gov, and from our in-house printer)
- All responses for all candidates/measures
- Overvotes (voter marks more than one)
- Undervotes (voter makes no vote)
- Write-in votes
- Blank ballot (an unvoted ballot)
- Results on the Secretary of State's election webpage is posting accurately

The Official Logic and Accuracy Test is conducted for each election. The Secretary of State's office attends and certifies the testing on all State and Federal elections.



Security of Ballots and Equipment

Voted ballots, electronic images of voted ballots and tabulation equipment are required to be kept in secure storage. Secure storage is a container or room that is locked, sealed, logged and accessed in the presence of two election staff throughout the election.

Sealing requires the use of uniquely numbered seals written on seal logs, verified and signed/initialed by two election staff. When opening, the seal must be verified against the seal log to detect any unauthorized access.

All transportation containers are required to be closed/locked with a seal that is logged in duplicate by the two staff. One copy goes in the transport container prior to sealing, the other copy is kept with the staff until opened at the counting center.

Scanned ballots are sealed in boxes or envelopes with tamper proof tape and numbered seal sticker(s) and logged by two election staff, then stored in a locked and sealed room through certification of the election.

RCW 29A.60.110, 120

WAC 434-261-045, 130

WAC 434-250-110



Cyber Security

In 2016, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated Elections a **Critical Infrastructure**. This has brought additional resources and assistance into the protection and security of elections. We continually work with the Secretary of State's office, and our county's IT department to increase the security of Mason County's elections.

As part of our required ongoing training and certification, our office has participated in numerous Cyber Security trainings including a National Election Cyber Drill, run by the Department of Homeland Security.

The ballot tabulation system **is not** connected to the internet. It is located in a secured room that can only be opened by two Election staff members. The results are downloaded onto a cleaned flash drive. The flash drives are provided by the Secretary of State, and they are only used once to protect the tabulation system from malware. Election network servers are secured in a separate, locked room. We have taken steps to protect tabulation equipment and election servers from electromagnetic interference.



Processing Ballots

Ballot Collection

Ballots are collected from the Shelton Post Office and Ballot Drop Boxes and brought to the Ballot Processing Room by two election staff. There, the ballot envelopes received are counted and logged to track the number of ballots received by location throughout the election.

Signature Verification

In our vote by mail system, signatures are the only way to validate identification of the voter submitting a ballot. The signature on the oath envelope is compared to the signature in the voter's record. All signature verification staff must complete a signature verification training taught by a Washington Secretary of State provided trainer.

Ballots are challenged if there is no signature, or the signature does not match the signature on the voter's record.

A letter is sent to voters whose ballot is challenged, giving them an opportunity to cure their ballot and have it counted. We also follow-up by telephone and/or email.

RCW 29A.40.110

WAC 434-250-110



Processing Ballots

Opening the Ballots

During opening, the Oath envelopes are placed voter information side down on the table to maintain voter secrecy.

Election staff verifies that the number of envelopes indicated on the group tag is the correct number for the batch of ballots to be opened.

Prior to removing the ballots from the secrecy sleeves, they shuffled to further maintain voter secrecy. Then, the ballots are removed from their secrecy sleeves.

RCW 29A.40.110

WAC 434-250-110



Processing Ballots

Inspection of Ballots

Ballots are inspected for marks that the tabulation system may not read properly and damaged ballots. These ballots are set aside for further review before scanning and are handled individually to ensure that the voter's intent is accurately captured.

Ballots without issues are scanned and processed normally.

Inspectors pull ballots for careful resolution that may have:

Vote corrections where the voter did not make another choice

Voting marks outside the oval.

The image shows two ballot sections. The top section is for 'Legislative District 35 State Representative Position 1'. It lists three candidates: Dan Griffey (Republican Party), James Thomas (Democratic Party), and an empty oval. The ballot shows a checkmark in the oval for James Thomas, but the name 'James Thomas' is crossed out with a large 'X'. The bottom section is for 'Legislative District 35 State Representative Position 2'. It lists two candidates: David Daggett (Democratic Party) and Drew C. MacEwen (Republican Party), plus an empty oval. The ballot shows a checkmark in the oval for David Daggett, but the name 'David' is written in the margin with an arrow pointing to the oval.

WAC 434-261-070



Processing Ballots

Ballot Duplication

Ballots that cannot be scanned are duplicated onto a new ballot. The ballots may not be scannable because they are torn or soiled or printed as such that cannot be scanned or any other reason that the scanner will not accept it.

Ballots that can be scanned but the votes cannot be detected properly (ballots printed from VoteWA.gov or printed in smaller text or other reasons).

“Ballot duplication” is a true copy of valid votes.

All ballots that require duplication are logged and tracked with a unique control number. Duplication requires a team of two and then audited by an additional team of two election staff.

RCW 29A.60.125

WAC 434-261-100



Processing Ballots

Scanning Ballots

Ballots are scanned into the tabulation system and the images are stored.

Resolution of Votes

The ballot tally system, Clear Ballot reviews marks in the target area individually. Resolution is the process of reviewing marks and ensuring they record correctly. This requires two election staff.

Example: A voter makes a correction and selects another choice; the system records it as an overvote. The staff must adjudicate the selection to reflect the intended vote.

RCW 29A.60.125

WAC 434-261-102

Tabulation

All ballots have been accepted at signature verifications are scanned into the system. Votes cannot be tabulated nor can results be displayed or released until after 8:00pm Election day.

RCW 29A.40.110

WAC 434-250-110



Auditing the Results

We encourage participation from the parties in the audit process. A representative from each of the two major political parties is required or the election staff will conduct the audit(s) solely.

Random Audit

Random Audits are conducted within 48 hours after the election. A race and 6 scan batches are selected by the parties or randomly by the election staff to be hand count the votes and compared to the tabulation system results.

Risk Limiting Audit (RLA)

RLA randomly selects ballots to compare to the tabulation system by a random seed pulled by the Secretary of State's Office staff.

Review of Anomalies

Review of ballot vote anomalies is done by reviewing the target areas of votes in the tabulation system. This review is looking for oddities that the election staff opening and inspecting ballots may have missed.

RCW 29A.60.170, 185

WAC 434-261-108, 110, 115-118



Reconciliation

The number of ballots received, challenged and accepted are reconciled daily to maintain accuracy and accountability.

We account for every ballot received, tabulated (counted), and rejection prior to every election certification.

The Secretary of State's Office requires counties to complete a reconciliation form that they provide and must be published on our website after certification of the election.

The information on the reconciliation form is the final count of ballots received, counted, rejected and all other ballots not listed (forwarded ballots, ballots received to late, no longer a voter, etc.).

RCW 29A.60.235

WAC 434-262-050, 060, 070



Reconciliation Form

Mason County Auditor

Reconciliation Form

General information		Registered voters eligible to participate	
County name	Mason	Active registered voters	3,685
Election date	4/26/2022	Inactive registered voters	349

Category Reconciliation (detailed accounting of ballots)

	Issued (number of voters issued ballots)	Credited voters in VoteWA (envelopes containing ballots)	Ballots Accepted (Counted / Tabulated)	Ballots not counted		Discrepancy (if zero, category balances)
				Ballots forwarded to other counties	Ballots Rejected	
UOCAVA	33	1	1	N/A	0	0
Federal write-in	N/A	0	0	N/A	0	0
Provisional	0	0	0	0	0	0
DREs	0	0	0	N/A	0	0
All voters not reported in above categories	3,644	1,459	1,425	1	33	0
Total for all voter categories	3,677	1,460	1,426	1	33	0

Summary

Reconciliation

Overall Ballot Reconciliation

Ballots Received	1,460
Ballots Accepted	1,426
Ballots Not Counted	34
Discrepancy	0

Voters credited to ballots counted

Credited voters in VoteWA	1,426
Credited envelopes without ballots	0
Voters not credited in VoteWA (examples: FWAB or ACP)	0
Total valid ballots	1,426
Discrepancy	0

Additional Information

Replacement Ballots

Requested	8
Issued	6
Returned	3
Counted	3
Rejected	0

Return method

Email	0
Fax	0
Deposited at staffed, unstaffed deposit sites and voting centers	636
Non-UOCAVA returned by Fax or Email	0

Generation method

VoteWA	1
Other online programs	0
PDF originating from county	0
Non-UOCAVA ballots issued electronically	1

AVU

Estimated number of paper ballots printed by AVU	1
--	---

Category discrepancy explanation

VoteWA discrepancy explanation

Report prepared by: Marie Stevenson

Date: May 6, 2022

Contact number: (360) 427-9670 ext. 469



Canvass of Rejected Ballots

The County Canvassing Board delegates the election staff to process ballots and conduct the election.

Ballots can only be rejected by the Canvassing Board.

The election staff refers all rejected ballots to the Canvassing Board for review that includes, but is not limited to:

- Unsigned ballot envelopes

- Signature on the envelope does not match the signature in the voters' registration file

- Empty envelopes

- Ballots received too late

- No ID of voter

- Questionable ballots (voter intent questioned)

- The Canvassing Board members individually review each ballot envelope or ballot presented to make the determination of if the ballot is to be counted or not. Rejecting or accepting a ballot requires a minimum of 2 votes from the 3 members.

RCW 29A.40.110, 60.040, 60.050, 60.140, 60.190, 60.221

WAC 434-260-010, 261-120, 261-050, 261-086, 250-110, 250-120, 262-013, 262-015, 262-031



Certification of Results

The County Canvassing Board consists of the County Auditor, Chair of the County legislative authority, and Prosecuting Attorney (or designee(s)). The Board reviews and certifies the results 10 days after Special Elections and the Presidential Primary, 14 days after the Primary Election, and 21 days after the General Election.

Upon the Certification, the election results become official. All ballots and signature cures must be received no later than the day before certification.



RCW 29A.60.140, 190

WAC 434-262-070



Election Observers

Observers Must Not

Touch ballots or ballot containers or equipment

Disrupt or interfere with the process

Distract the staff

Engage in conversation with voters who may be present.

Discuss political issues while observing

Advocate for or against any candidate or contest in any way. Example: wear clothing, buttons, etc.

Use a cell phone or any other recording type device in the ballot processing room.

Make record of any information regarding voters or votes on ballots.

Have any type of weapon

Observers Must abide by the observer rules provided and posted in the ballot processing room.



Schedule

Ballot processing begins after ballots are mailed to voters. Processing times can vary based on the number of ballots received and may not occur every day.

The ballot processing schedule is posted on the election's website at least two business days prior. masoncountywaelections.gov
For more detailed information please contact our office.

The ballot processing center has limited space. Each party can schedule up to three observers at a time throughout the day.

Be mindful that we would also like to accommodate anyone who may want to observe who is not affiliated with a party.



*... observation of the process
and procedures helps ensure
the integrity of our elections....*

Questions/Comments



The Mason County Auditor's office welcomes and encourages individuals to observe the process of conducting an election. The ballot processing room can accommodate up to six observers at any given time to include representatives from each major political party and interested citizens. The ballot processing schedule is posted on our website masoncountywaelections.gov at least two days in advance. The parties are asked to provide the names and scheduled hours of who will be observing at least one day in advance by email to elections@masoncountywa.gov

Observers must follow these rules for observing ballot processing:

- Check in at the kiosk and wear the provided badge at all times.
- Secure all personal items (coats, backpacks, purses, **all electronic devices**, etc.) in the provided lockers.
- Do not disrupt or interfere with any process.
 - Examples of interference include obstructing the path of voters' or election staff, engaging in conversation with voters, electioneering by wearing campaign clothing, buttons, or other paraphernalia.
- Do not touch any machinery, equipment, supplies, or ballots.
- Stay within the designated observer areas.
- Do not talk to or ask any questions of Election staff. All questions and concerns shall be directed to: Marie Stevenson, Susan Blankenship, Kailey Chappell or Steve Duenkel.
- Limit conversations and discussions with other observers.
- Do not bring food or drink into the facility. (A closed-lid water bottle is allowed as long as it is kept away from work areas.)
- Do not record any information regarding voters or votes on ballots.
- Follow requests from Marie Stevenson, Susan Blankenship, Kailey Chappell, Steve Duenkel or designated area lead.
- Weapons of any type are prohibited in the building.

If any observer or visitor violates the above rules, they will be asked to leave the facility. We reserve the right to ask observers to leave at any time.

Observers are encouraged to observe ballot collection at the drop box locations and from the USPS. Ballot collection normally begins at 8:00am but may change with each election and volume of ballots anticipated. Contact the Election Department for the ballot collection schedule the day prior to observing.

Observers must follow these rules for observing ballot collection:

- Inform the election staff by phone or email at least 1 hour prior, which ballot drop box(es) they will be observing.
- Do not disrupt or interfere with any process.
 - Examples of interference include obstructing the path of voters' or election staff, not allowing enough space for ballot collection staff to feel comfortable, engaging in conversation with voters, electioneering by wearing campaign clothing, buttons, or other paraphernalia.
- Do not touch any supplies for securing ballot drop boxes, or ballots or ballot containers.
- Do not talk to or ask any questions of voters or Election staff. All questions and concerns shall be directed to: Marie Stevenson, Susan Blankenship, Kailey Chappell or Steve Duenkel.
- Limit conversations and discussions with other observers.
- Do not record any information regarding voters or ballot envelopes.
- Follow requests from Marie Stevenson, Susan Blankenship, Kailey Chappell or Steve Duenkel or designated area lead.
- Drive safely and follow traffic laws.

Election staff will not wait for observers to be present to collect ballots.

Other observer opportunities to be scheduled in advance include:

Witnessing ballot production processes at K&H Printer in Everett and designated USPS facilities.

Interested individuals or for more information, please contact, Steve Duenkel at sduenkel@masoncountywa.gov