

## OPENING AND PROCESSING ABSENTEE BALLOTS (Page 1 of 2)

Absentee ballots must be opened, processed and counted by election clerks **before** the polls close on election day.

### Steps

1. One by one an election official (Clerk 1), while observed by another election official, opens the return (outer) envelope and verifies that the voter statement, identification (if required\*) and the ballot (inner) envelope have been properly placed in the return envelope.
2. If the voter statement and ID (if ID is required), are in the return envelope separate from the inner “Ballot Only” envelope:
  - Clerk 1 reads aloud the voter’s name and precinct from the voter statement.
  - Clerk 2 makes a duplicate list of the name and precinct of the voter.
  - The election officials compare the name, address, dates of birth and signature on the absentee ballot application against the same information on the voter statement.
  - The election officials compare the information on the voter’s identification (if required) against the information on the voter statement.
  - The election officials compare the name and address of the bearer, agent or administrator written on the absentee ballot return envelope with the information on the voter statement.
  - If everything is in order, place the unopened inner “Ballot Only” envelope into the absentee ballot box.
  - Repeat the process for each absentee voter whose materials are in order.

*\* Certain voters (e.g. first-time voters who registered by mail and did not include identification when registering) may be "flagged" with a "must show ID" notation on the Precinct Voter Registration List (PVR). If voting by absentee ballot, these "flagged" voters must include in the return envelope a copy of a current and valid photo identification or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter. If identification is not present, the ballot is considered a provisional ballot.*

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If the voter statement and/or ID (if ID is required) are **NOT** in the return envelope separate from the inner “Ballot Only” envelope:

1. Clerk 1 removes the inner “Ballot Only” envelope from the outer “Return” envelope and hands it to Clerk 2.
2. Clerk 2 inspects the inner “Ballot Only” envelope while being observed by Clerk 1 and removes the voter statement and/or identification documents, if found there, from the inner “Ballot Only” envelope and hands them to Clerk 1.
3. Clerk 2 returns the inner “Ballot Only” envelope and any found voter statement/ID documents to Clerk 1 and Clerk 1 places the inner “Ballot Only” envelope back into the outer “Return” envelope.
4. Clerk 1 reads aloud from the voter statement, and regular processing procedures (see above) are followed.

## Quick Guide

### GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING VALIDITY OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS

- A name on a voter statement that is slightly different from the way the name is stated on the absentee ballot application (John A. Doe on one; John Doe on the other, for instance) “compares” if *all* the other information (DOB, address, signature) demonstrates that it is the same person.
- Dates of birth must match. 4-11-1953 does not match 11-4-1953, for instance.
- Addresses must match. 102 Main Street and 201 Main Street do not match, for instance.
- Election officials are not handwriting experts. Reject a ballot on the basis that the signatures do not compare only if there is a distinct and easily recognizable difference between the signature on the absentee ballot application and the voter statement.
- Certain voters (e.g. first-time voters who registered by mail and did not include identification when registering) may be “flagged” with a “must show ID” notation on the Precinct Voter Registration List (PVR). If voting by absentee ballot, these “flagged” voters must include in the return envelope a copy of a **current and valid** photo identification or a copy of a **current** utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the **name and address of** the voter. If identification is not present, the ballot is considered a provisional ballot.
- If there is any doubt about the validity of a ballot, set it aside for the election commission to review.

## PROVISIONAL ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Provisional absentee ballots include:

- Absentee ballots challenged by a poll watcher;
- Absentee ballots cast by first-time voters who registered by mail and who did not provide identification when registering or voting absentee; and
- Absentee ballots delivered by a bearer/agent/administrator for which the name and address of the bearer/agent/administrator written by the county clerk on the return envelope does not match the information contained in the voter statement.

**See page 56 for information on REJECTED ballots.**

**When an absentee ballot becomes provisional, the absentee ballot clerk should:**

- Place the absentee voter package (the return envelope and everything that is inside it) into a provisional voter envelope;
- Record on the provisional voter envelope the reason for the challenge or that the voter did not provide identification; and
- Set the provisional ballots aside for consideration by the election commission.

**Poll Watcher challenges must be made at the time the voter's name and voting precinct are read aloud by the election official.**

## COUNTING ABSENTEE BALLOTS (Page 1 of 2)

After processing all the absentee ballots, the absentee ballot election officials shake the ballot box containing the inner “Ballot Only” envelopes thoroughly to mix the ballots.

**When it is time to count the ballots, election officials must:**

1. Open the inner “Ballot Only” envelopes;
2. Count any write-in votes first; and
3. Count the remaining ballots by hand or electronic tabulating device at the discretion of the election commission.

**Absentee ballots on hand (and early votes) must be counted before the polls close on election day and the initial count reported to the Secretary of State no later than 30 minutes after the polls close.**

## COUNTING ABSENTEE BALLOTS (Page 2 of 2)

### Reject any ballot if:

- It comes in a bulk mailing (see additional information below);
- No voter statement is found in the return envelope or the ballot envelope;
- If the election commission finds that the name, date of birth, address or signature on the voter statement do not compare to the corresponding information on the absentee ballot application;
- The absentee ballot was cast by a voter who dies before the polls open on election day if it is postmarked, delivered by a bearer, agent or administrator, or, in the case of an active duty “armed services” voter, executed *after* the date the voter died;
- If the return envelope indicates the ballot was returned by a bearer, agent or administrator but the voter has not authorized a bearer/agent/administrator on the voter statement.

***BEST PRACTICE: If ballots are rejected by absentee ballot clerks in opening and processing, re-package all ballot-related materials (inner envelope, voter statement, etc.) in the outer “Return” envelope, mark the envelope as rejected, state the reason for the rejection, and keep all rejected ballots in their envelopes in a separate, secure place until storage. The return envelope should not be sealed because it must remain available for public inspection.***

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

**Answer the following review questions. Check the Answer Key at the bottom. Then go back to the appropriate sections of the manual to study any areas that you missed.**

- 1) What time do the polls open?
  - a) 7:00 a.m.
  - b) Whenever the poll workers are ready and a voter is in line
  - c) 7:30 a.m.
  
- 2) Who should administer the oath to poll workers at the polling site?
  - a) The county judge
  - b) Other poll workers at the poll
  - c) A notary
  
- 3) Which of the following voters are required to provide ID?
  - a) All voters
  - b) Only voters that the poll workers do not know
  - c) Only voters with a **“MUST SHOW ID”** notation on the **Precinct Voter Registration (PVR) List**
  
- 4) A voter who does not have a notation on the **PVR List** and who does not show ID should:
  - a) Not be allowed to vote
  - b) Be allowed to vote only a **PROVISIONAL** ballot
  - c) Be allowed to vote a **REGULAR** ballot, after the poll worker writes **“No ID”** on the **PVR List**
  
- 5) In a primary election, the voter must state:
  - a) Whether he or she is a Democrat or Republican
  - b) Whether he or she is an Independent
  - c) In which party’s primary or other election he or she wants to vote
  
- 6) Before giving a paper ballot to the voter, the poll worker must initial:
  - a) The back of the ballot
  - b) The front of the ballot
  - c) No part of the ballot
  
- 7) What should poll workers do with the ballot stub before giving the ballot to the voter?
  - a) Leave the stub attached to the ballot
  - b) Remove the stub and throw it away
  - c) Remove the stub and place it in the stub box
  - d) Tell the voter to remove the stub

- 8) If a voter with a disability requests to vote unassisted, he or she should be:
- Directed to a voting machine equipped for voters with disabilities
  - Assisted by 2 poll workers
  - Assisted by any person selected and named by the voter
  - Any of the above
- 9) If a voter provides an address that differs from the address on the **PVR List**, the poll worker must contact:
- The post office
  - The county election commission
  - The county clerk
- 10) If a voter's current address is not within the voting precinct, the poll worker should:
- Call the county clerk to determine the voter's correct polling site and send the voter there to vote
  - Give the voter a **PROVISIONAL** ballot
  - Let the voter cast a **REGULAR** ballot
- 11) If a voter's name is not listed on the **PVR List** and the county clerk cannot verify the voter's registration, the poll worker must:
- Allow the voter to cast a **REGULAR** ballot
  - Inform the voter that he or she cannot vote
  - Allow the voter to cast a **PROVISIONAL** ballot
- 12) A candidate in person at a counting site or absentee ballot processing site as a poll watcher:
- Is required to show identification to an election official
  - Must present a **Poll Watcher Authorization Form**
  - Is not required to show ID or present a **Poll Watcher Authorization Form**
- 13) Campaign workers carrying political signs may:
- Stand just outside the door to the polling room
  - Come inside the polling site as long as they do not speak to anyone
  - Stand at least 100' from the primary entrance to the building containing the polling site
- 14) If a voter leaves the poll and abandons his or her ballot on a voting machine screen without finishing the voting process, two poll workers should:
- Cancel the ballot
  - Complete the process of casting the abandoned ballot and document the circumstances
  - Stop using the voting machine for the remainder of the day
- 15) May people standing in line to vote when the polls close at 7:30 p.m. still vote?
- Yes
  - No



- 16) The processing and counting of absentee ballots is:
- a) Open to candidates in person
  - b) Open to authorized poll watchers
  - c) Open to the media and public
  - d) All of the above
- 17) If the **PVR List** indicates that a voter appearing to vote at the poll has already been delivered an absentee ballot, poll workers:
- a) Should allow the voter to cast a **REGULAR** ballot
  - b) Should allow the voter to cast a **PROVISIONAL** ballot
  - c) Should NOT allow the voter to vote
- 18) For Primary Runoff Elections, poll workers must refer to the “D”, “R”, or “NP” notation on the **PVR List** to:
- a) Ensure that the voter is not attempting to cross-over vote
  - b) Determine that the voter is eligible to vote the ballot that he or she is requesting
  - c) Determine the voter’s party affiliation
  - d) Both a and b
- 19) If a voter votes as a result of a court order extending the time for closing the poll, which procedure must be followed:
- a) Allow a voter to cast a regular ballot; keeping it separate from any other regular ballots cast by voters during regular voting hours
  - b) Court orders extending the time for closing the poll are prohibited in Arkansas
  - c) Allow a voter to cast a provisional ballot; keeping it separate from any other provisional ballots cast by voters during regular voting hours
- 20) Federal law requires that every poll have at least one voting machine for use by voters with disabilities. These electronic voting machines are commonly called:
- a) Scanners
  - b) Touch screen or **DRE** machines
  - c) Lever machines

## Answer Key

1–c, 2-b, 3-c, 4-c, 5-c, 6-a, 7-c, 8-a, 9-c, 10-a, 11-c, 12-a, 13-c, 14-b, 15-a, 16-d, 17-b, 18-d, 19-c, 20-b.