

Federal Elections and the Electoral Process

■ Overview

In this lesson students are introduced to the processes and procedures of a federal election. Students will uncover word clues, develop a key term list and find the key terms in a word search. Opportunity is available to target specific concepts or issues for further discussion.

■ Objectives

Students will:

- Understand and explain how electoral boundaries are created and revised.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the voting process (the writ, enumeration, election campaign, voting, tabulation).
- Identify and understand different electoral systems - first past the post, proportional representation and single transferable vote.

■ Get Involved

Volunteer with Elections BC or local election committee to work at a polling booth. See <http://www.elections.bc.ca> or <http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca>.

■ Basics for the Teacher

This lesson provides students with the details and procedures of the federal election process. The information provided can be found at the Elections Canada website (<http://www.elections.ca>). Information needed for this lesson is in *Activity Sheet 5-1: Elections*.

■ Student Handouts

Activity Sheet 5-1: Elections

Activity Sheet 5-2: Electoral System Word Search

■ Instructions for the Teacher

Activity 1: Elections

- This lesson may be assigned as a homework assignment or as an in-class activity. If you are planning to have the students complete the word clues and word search in class it is advisable to assign *Activity Sheet 5-1: Elections* in advance to save reading time and allow for a quick review prior to engaging in the activity. In step one the students use notes, the activity sheet and prior knowledge to uncover the thirty word clues. The students will write out the words before they search for them in the puzzle. Ask students to write the words out on the sheet provided prior to moving on to the word search. Upon completion of the word list it is advisable to review the terms and concepts with the students to round out their understanding of the election process. *Activity Sheet 5-2: Electoral System Word Search* can be completed as a bonus activity, homework or an in class assignment.
- Discuss the different electoral systems and how electoral boundaries are created with your students prior to the word search.

■ Assessment

The activities in this lesson can be assessed as homework marks, class participation marks or you may score them based on the number of responses - 30 for the word list and 30 for the word search.

■ Extension Activities

1. Contact your local Member of Parliament and conduct an interview on the election process. <http://webinfo.parl.gc.ca>
Consider:
 - Campaign funding
 - Campaign expenses
 - Volunteer staff/staffing
 - Advertisement
 - Campaign platform
 - Delegate independence
 - Party support/infrastructure
2. You are a candidate in the next federal election. Describe five key issues that you would use to build your campaign platform around. For each issue explain the 5 W's (who, what, where, when, why).

Activity Sheet: Elections

Name: _____

Block: _____ Date: _____

(All information adapted from Elections Canada
<http://www.elections.ca>)

Launching an Election

For a general election, the Governor General (at the request of the Prime Minister) dissolves Parliament, and the Governor in Council (the Governor General acting on the advice of Cabinet) sets the date of the election and the date by which returning officers must return the writs.

A writ is a formal document directing a returning officer to conduct an election in his or her electoral district. After election day, the returning officer writes the name of the winning candidate on that district's writ.

By law, the time between the issue of the writs and election day must be at least 36 days. In practice, general elections usually last 36 days. An exception was the 39th general election, which included the 2005 Christmas and New Year holiday period and lasted 55 days.

Issuing the Writs

Once advised of the election, the Chief Electoral Officer sends a notice to each returning officer, directing him or her to rent office space, open a returning office and provide the services that enable electors to exercise their right to vote. At the same time, the writs of election are being printed, with the dates for election day and for the close of nominations. After signing the writs, the Chief Electoral Officer sends one to each returning officer, who then publishes a notice of election informing voters of the important dates and other details.

The Election Call

1. The Prime Minister asks the Governor General to dissolve the House of Commons (or the Government loses a confidence vote in the House of Commons).

2. The Governor General issues a proclamation dissolving Parliament and directing that the writs of election be issued.
3. The Chief Electoral Officer issues writs that direct returning officers to hold an election in each electoral district.
4. Returning officers open their offices.
5. Voting by special ballot begins.
6. Elections Canada sends preliminary lists of electors to returning officers.
7. Preliminary candidates and party election expense limits are calculated.
8. Revision of the lists of electors begins.
9. Returning officers mail voter information cards to registered electors.
10. Returning officers receive candidates' nomination papers and deposits.
11. Canadian Forces electors begin voting.
12. Voting at advance polls takes place.
13. Voting by incarcerated electors and those in acute care hospitals begins.
14. Revision ends, and the deadline for special ballot registration expires.
15. Revised candidate and party election expense limits are calculated.

Election Day

- Electors vote at ordinary and mobile polling stations.
- Preliminary voting results are available after the polls close across the country.

Voting

There are a number of ways to vote. The most common way is at the polls on election day. Voters can also cast their ballots at an advance poll or by special ballot, either at the office of the returning officer or through the mail. As additional services, Elections Canada provides

mobile polls for voters living in chronic care institutions and, in certain cases, bedside voting by special ballot for voters in acute care hospitals. In exceptional circumstances – where a voter is registered for a special ballot but cannot go to the office of the returning officer or mark the ballot because of a disability – an election officer can go to the voter’s home to help mark and receive the ballot in the presence of a witness.

Ordinary polls

This is the method of voting used by the vast majority of voters. During the hours of voting on election day, electors go to the polling station indicated on their voter information cards, have their names crossed off the list and go behind a voting screen to mark a ballot.

Voting hours on election day and staggered voting hours

To compensate for Canada’s six time zones, polls open and close (in local time) as follows:

Newfoundland Time	8:30 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Atlantic Time	8:30 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Eastern Time	9:30 a.m. – 9:30 p.m.
Central Time	8:30 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Mountain Time	7:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Pacific Time	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

The *Canada Elections Act* requires polling stations to be open for voting for 12 consecutive hours on election day. The hours of voting are staggered by time zone, so that a majority of results will be available at approximately the same time across the country. If necessary, the

Chief Electoral Officer may modify the voting hours in a riding to make them coincide with the voting hours in other ridings in the same time zone.

Marking the Ballot

At the polling station specified on the voter information card, the poll clerk crosses the voter’s name off the voters list. The deputy returning officer hands the voter a folded ballot with the initials of the deputy returning officer on the outside. The voter then re-folds the ballot so that the deputy returning officer’s initials are visible and hands it to the deputy returning officer.

The deputy returning officer checks the initials and the number shown on the counterfoil, removes the counterfoil and discards it, and returns the ballot to the voter. The voter, or the deputy returning officer at the voter’s request, places the folded ballot in the ballot box. The poll clerk then places a mark in the “Voted” column beside the elector’s name on the voters list.

Advance Voting

Three days – Friday, Saturday and Monday, the 10th, 9th and 7th days before polling day – are designated for advance voting to accommodate electors who know that they will be unable, or do not wish, to vote on election day. Advance polls are open between the hours of noon and 8:00 p.m.

Special Ballot

The *Canada Elections Act* provides alternative procedures for voting specifically designed for, but not limited to, electors who:

1. Reside temporarily outside Canada (less than five consecutive years, with certain exceptions) at the time of an election.
2. Reside in Canada, but might be away from their electoral districts when it is time to vote.
3. Are members of the Canadian Forces.
4. Are incarcerated.

Joshua Berson Photography



Any elector can register to vote by special ballot at any point before the sixth-to-last day before election day. Application forms are available from returning officers, on the Elections Canada website or directly from Elections Canada in Ottawa. Once the registration is accepted, a kit containing a ballot and three envelopes is mailed to the elector. Once registered to vote by special ballot, an elector cannot vote in any other way. Electors can vote only for a candidate who is running in their own electoral district no matter where they cast and mail their special ballots. To preserve secrecy, the elector seals the special ballot in the unmarked envelope, puts that sealed envelope in the envelope with the electoral district's name on it, seals this second envelope and puts it in the mailing envelope.

The Results

Shortly after the polls close on election day, the unofficial results begin to come in to Elections Canada. As the reports arrive from the various polling stations on election night, Elections Canada releases the results to the media for immediate publication or broadcast. Simultaneously, Elections Canada hosts a live feed on its Web site of the unofficial results by riding, by major centre, by province or territory, nationwide and by political party.

Wrap-up

1. Returning officers carry out the validation of the results.
2. Judicial recounts are conducted if necessary.
3. Returning officers return the writs, which declare the winning candidate in each riding.
4. New members of Parliament are sworn in, and the new Parliament is convened.
5. The Chief Electoral Officer reports on the election and the official results.
6. Candidates, political parties and third parties submit financial reports.
7. Reimbursement of expenses to candidates and political parties takes place.
8. Candidates dispose of surplus funds.

Validation of the Results

Within seven days of election day (unless exceptional circumstances prevent some ballot boxes from being available on time), each returning officer validates the results by examining the documents relating to the vote count to verify the election night calculations. Only after the validation has been completed can the official voting results be published.

Judicial Recounts

A judicial recount is automatically requested by the returning officer and conducted by a judge if the number of votes separating the candidate with the most votes and any other candidate is less than one 1000th of the total number of votes cast in that electoral district. A recount may also be conducted if it appears to a judge to whom a request for a recount has been made that an error may have occurred during the count.

If the two top-ranking candidates have each received the same number of votes after a recount, a new election is held in that electoral district.

Election Reports

The Return of the Writs

After the sixth day following the validation of the results (or immediately after a judicial recount), the returning officer records the winning candidate's name on the writ received at the beginning of the election, signs it and returns it to the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Chief Electoral Officer's Reports

After each general election, the Chief Electoral Officer must submit three public reports to the Speaker of the House of Commons. The first covers the official voting results by polling division and is published without delay. The second, published within 90 days of the return of the writs, is a report on the election and any activities of Elections Canada since the date of the previous narrative report that the Chief Electoral Officer considers should be brought to the

attention of the House of Commons. As soon as possible after a general election, the Chief Electoral Officer also reports on any changes to the electoral legislation that he judges desirable for the better administration of the *Act*. Elections Canada publishes each of these reports in print form and makes them available online at <http://www.elections.ca>.

By-Elections

When a seat in Parliament becomes officially vacant in between election periods, the Speaker of the House of Commons must inform the Chief Electoral Officer immediately with a Speaker's warrant. Between the 11th and the 180th day after the Chief Electoral Officer receives this warrant, the Governor in Council must set the date for holding a by-election. Once the date is known, the Chief Electoral Officer issues a writ to the returning officer of the electoral district concerned, directing him or her to hold a by-election on that date. If a general election is called after the by-election writ has been issued and before the by-election is held, the writ for the by-election is considered withdrawn, and the Chief Electoral Officer publishes a notice in the Canada Gazette to that effect.

Referendums

Three federal referendums have been held in Canada since Confederation: in 1898, on whether to prohibit the sale of alcohol; in 1942, on compulsory military service (conscriptio); and in 1992, on the Charlottetown constitutional accord. Under the *Referendum Act* that came into force just before the 1992 referendum, only questions related to the Constitution of Canada can be asked in a federal referendum.

Federal referendums and elections cannot be held on the same day. The *Referendum Act* allows the Chief Electoral Officer to adapt the *Canada Elections Act* by regulation for the purposes of applying it to a referendum.

Activity Sheet 5-2: Electoral System Word List

Read over the notes above and list the terms or concepts you think are important below on this list. Later you will be given a word search to complete using this list of words.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____
26. _____
27. _____
28. _____
29. _____
30. _____

Activity Sheet: Electoral System Word Search

Name: _____ Block: _____ Date: _____

Use the correct word, term or concept from your word list for each of the clues below.

1. Another word for an electoral district. _____
2. There are _____ electoral districts in Canada.
3. The form of electoral system use in Canada. _____
4. The second step in the election process is termed "dropping the _____".
5. These boundaries are based on population and geography. _____
6. An alternative voting system; common to European countries. _____
7. The act of selecting a candidate on the ballot. _____
8. The agency in charge of federal elections. _____
9. All persons eligible to vote are collectively known by this term. _____
10. You can only vote in a federal election if you are a Canadian _____.
11. The process of registering voters. _____
12. These are used to read the 'mood' of voters. _____
13. A blended form of voting. It was suggested for BC in the last two elections. _____
14. The members of a riding are also known as _____.
15. The local workplace of a Member of Parliament is called the _____ office.
16. The process of counting votes after the polling stations have closed. _____
17. An election must be held once in every _____ years except in times of emergency or war.
18. This term describes the closing of Parliament in order to call an election. _____
19. Changing or redefining electoral boundaries is called _____.
20. All elected candidates will serve in _____.
21. The person that oversees all aspects of the federal election process. _____
22. Candidates in an election have limits placed on contributions and _____.
23. Each local candidate is _____ by the members of the party.
24. Voters go to a _____ station on the day of an election to fill in a ballot.
25. The _____ at the request of the Prime Minister announces the call for an election.
26. Polling stations must be open for a minimum of _____ consecutive hours on an election day.
27. In 2002 these Canadians received the right to vote in federal elections. _____
28. The law that covers all elements of the federal election process and procedures. _____
29. If you cannot vote on the day of an election there are _____ for three days prior to submit a ballot.
30. Polling is frequently set up at local churches or _____.

Activity Sheet: Electoral System Word Search

KEY

Use the correct word, term or concept from your word list for each of the clues below.

1. Another word for an electoral district. **Riding**
2. There are **308** electoral districts in Canada.
3. The form of electoral system use in Canada. **First Past the Post**
4. The second step in the election process is termed "dropping the **Writ**".
5. These boundaries are based on population and geography. **Constituencies**
6. An alternative voting system; common to European countries.
Proportional Representation
7. The act of selecting a candidate on the ballot. **Voting**
8. The agency in charge of federal elections. **Elections Canada**
9. All persons eligible to vote are collectively known by this term. **Electorate**
10. You can only vote in a federal election if you are a Canadian **Citizen**.
11. The process of registering voters. **Enumeration**
12. These are used to read the 'mood' of voters. **Polling**
13. A blended form of voting. It was suggested for BC in the last two elections.
STV (Single Transferable Vote)
14. The members of a riding are also known as **Constituents**.
15. The local workplace of a Member of Parliament is called the **Electoral District** office.
16. The process of counting votes after the polling stations have closed. **Tabulation**
17. An election must be held once in every **five** years except in times of emergency or war.
18. This term describes the closing of Parliament in order to call an election. **Dissolution**
19. Changing or redefining electoral boundaries is called **Redistribution**.
20. All elected candidates will serve in **Parliament**.
21. The person that oversees all aspects of the federal election process.
Chief Electoral Officer
22. Candidates in an election have limits placed on contributions and **expenses**.
23. Each local candidate is **nominated** by the members of the party.
24. Voters go to a **Polling** station on the day of an election to fill in a ballot.
25. The **Governor General** at the request of the Prime Minister announces the call for an election.
26. Polling stations must be open for a minimum of **12** consecutive hours on an election day.
27. In 2002 these Canadians received the right to vote in federal elections. **Prisoners**
28. The law that covers all elements of the federal election process and procedures.
Canada Elections Act
29. If you cannot vote on the day of an election there are **Advance Polls** for three days prior to submit a ballot.
30. Polling is frequently set up at local churches or **Schools**.