



# GOAL: Prepare to Vote & Vote

Contributed by Ellen Loebel  
San José Public Library

## Introduction

This lesson plan will help you feel more comfortable voting. If this is your first time voting – congratulations! If you have already voted, we hope these ideas will help you feel more comfortable with the voting process. We want you to feel that you are making good choices and that you know what you are voting for. By the time you complete these lessons, you will be able to vote and you will make sure that your voice is heard. These lessons will give you many steps to practice so that you will know how to vote. This goal will take many tutoring sessions, but it will be fun and you will learn a lot while you are doing it.

Remember that voting is not a test. It is your chance to help make decisions about how your city, state, and country work and who will lead them. You do not have to vote on everything. Pick only the people and things that are important to you.

## Getting Started

To begin, you have to sign up to vote. To be able to vote you:

- Have to be at least 18 and a U. S. citizen
- Have to live in California
- Can not be in prison or on parole for a felony
- Can not be judged mentally incompetent

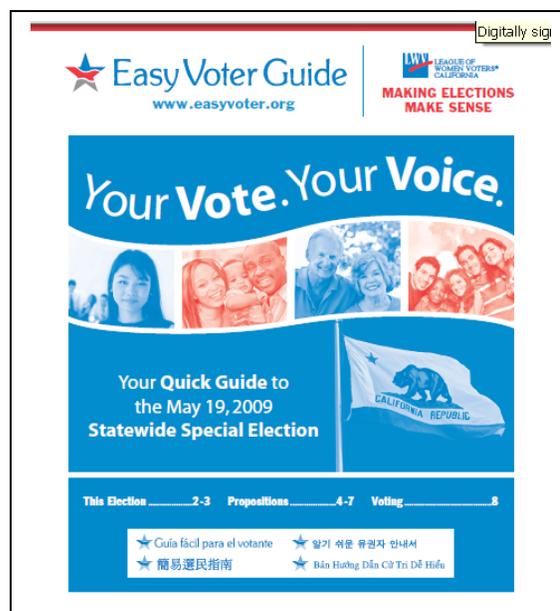
You can usually get a form to sign up to be a voter at your library or post office. Fill it out with your tutor, and then send it in the mail. Use a blue or black pen and print all the information. Only your signature should be in handwriting. You will be able to choose 3 things:

- If you want your voting information in English or another language
- If you want to belong to a political party
- If you want to get your ballot in the mail or go to a polling place to vote on election day

In some counties you do not even need a stamp. Usually you have to sign up two weeks or more before the election.

**Easy Voter Guide.** After you have signed up to vote, you will also need a copy of the “Easy Voter Guide.” This short guide is published several weeks before a big election by the League of Women Voters. It is the result of a collaborative effort between the California State Library and many other partners and it was created to be easier to understand than the one published by the State of California.

The Easy Voter Guide explains all of the people and the issues for elections at the state and national levels. Look for symbols to help you, like the “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” symbols. Sometimes these tell you what some people think is good or bad. Sometimes, it means what a “Yes” vote means or what a “No” vote means. *This guide does not have an opinion. It just gives the information.*



**Easy Voter Guide Website.** The Easy Voter Guide website [www.easyvoter.org](http://www.easyvoter.org) sometimes has videos that will help you understand what you are voting on so you can learn about the election in other ways besides reading. You can also use this website to find out about the steps of voting or to look up information, for example to find who represents you.

After you sign up to vote, you will get information in the mail beginning one month or more before the election. The information will come from:

- The State of California Elections Department
- Your county elections department
- Groups representing people or things to vote on in the next election

Bring all of this information to your tutoring sessions so that you and your tutor can read through it together. Ask your tutor to bring information from the local newspapers. There will be stories and opinion pieces in the newspaper that will offer more information. Look for information in newspapers from different areas to see if there are different opinions. Or you can look at a weekly newspaper and a daily newspaper and compare their opinions. Sometimes they will give you suggestions about how to vote. You have to think about all the information and what is important to you.

**Vote by Mail or Go to the Polls?** One of the first things you will have to decide is if you will vote at home, by mail, or in person at a voting place. You had the chance when you signed up to vote to choose “Vote by Mail.” You can change your mind before the election and ask for a vote

by mail ballot. If you are a first-time voter, it is probably a good idea to choose Vote by Mail. Then you can take your time and vote at home. Just make sure that you send in the ballot with stamps on it a week or more before the election. The ballot must be at the election office before the end of Election Day so that it can be counted. If it comes after Election Day, it will not be counted. You can also take your ballot on the day of the election to the elections office or to any voting place in your county.

For more information, as an example, you can watch a video about voting by mail on the Santa Clara County elections website:

<http://www.sccvote.org/portal/site/rov/>

has some videos about getting ready to vote. The speaker speaks very fast, so stop it regularly and repeat parts that you do not understand. It has a lot of great information about voting by mail.

If you want the experience of going to a voting place on Election Day, then do not choose Vote by Mail. You can take someone to help you. You will also probably have to take your ID with you the first time you vote.

**Sample Ballot.** After you sign up to vote, you will get a lot of information in your mailbox. You will get a sample ballot. The sample ballot has information about:

- where you can vote
- how to vote
- who and what to vote on

The sample ballot looks just like the real ballot you will get in the mail or at your voting place. When you decide who and what to vote for, mark your sample ballot. Take it with you if you go to vote at a polling place and use it to guide you in filling in the real ballot.

**More Mail.** You will also get at least one guide from the State of California. This guide will have information on elections that are for all of California. For example, if there is an election for the governor, everyone in the state will have the chance to vote for this person. Some elections are just for your area. That information will be in the guide from your county elections office.

You will also get a lot of information that is paid for by groups that want you to vote for a person or for a thing, sometimes called a measure or proposition.

## Websites

[www.easyvoter.org](http://www.easyvoter.org) – You can find the Easy Voter Guide (EVG) here plus even more information on government. The EVG is an easy-to-read, nonpartisan guide to statewide elections. It is a service of the League of Women Voters in partnership with the California State Library and the California Secretary of State’s Office. The guide is published in five languages and includes information on elected offices, propositions, political parties and voting issues. The website also offers an “All About Voting” section and information on reaching elected officials.

<http://www.smartvoter.org/> - Find out about every candidate and issue according to your zip code at the “Smart Voter” website.

<http://ca.lwv.org/> - The League of Women Voters of California website is a non-partisan place to get more information on issues like education, health care, and the State budget. The League “encourages informed and active participation in government.”

## Vocabulary

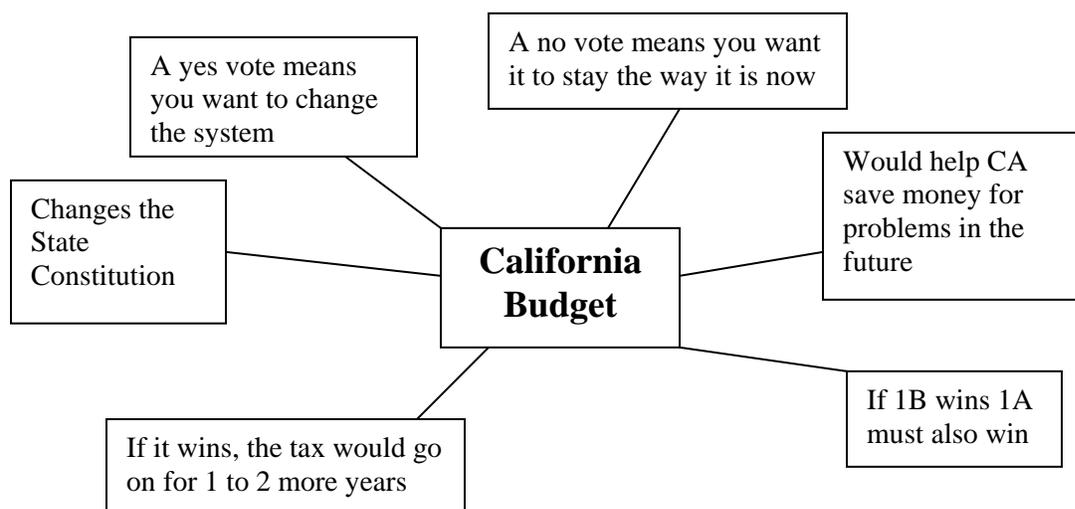
Amendment	An amendment is a change. Sometimes a proposition will ask voters to make an amendment to how the law works now.
Ballot	The paper where you mark your vote. A ballot can also be on a computer if you vote in person.
Budget	The amount of money a government can spend during a year. For example, California has a budget that says how much money it can spend on health care, safety, roads, and schools.
Candidate	A person who is running for office and wants to be elected.
Constitution	A set of laws. California has a Constitution. The United States has a set of laws (a Constitution) that is more powerful than the California Constitution. Sometimes in California we vote on propositions that would change California’s Constitution.
Initiative	A petition. People who live in California and are signed up to vote can sign a statement to put something on the ballot. For example, a few years ago, the voters put an initiative on the ballot to change the way health insurance for kids is paid for. The petition was an initiative.
Measure	This is a statement that you will vote on in an election. You usually have to pick yes or no. Sometimes it is called a proposition. A measure can be for an election just in your area, or it can be for the whole state.
Partisan/Nonpartisan	Has an opinion./Does not have an opinion. A mailing from a

	person running for office is partisan because it has an opinion. The Easy Voter Guide is nonpartisan because it does not have an opinion. It just gives the facts.
Polling place	The place near your home where you vote.
Proposition	A proposition is also called a measure. You usually have to pick yes or no. It is usually for the whole state.
Register	To sign up. You have to register to vote at least two weeks before the election.
Representatives	We elect people to represent us in our city, our county, in Sacramento, and in Washington, D. C. Sometimes they ask us what is important to us. Sometimes they make decisions for us.
Sacramento	The capitol of California.
Washington, D. C.	The capitol of the United States.

## Reading Practice

**Easy Voter Guide.** The Easy Voter Guide is the best way to practice reading election material. One way to read the material in the Voter Guide is to use the technique described in LitStart, Strategy 15. Divide the Easy Voter Guide into small pieces. Discuss what each section is about, honing in on challenging vocabulary words. Then read aloud the information and tell what this part is about in your own words. Also, talk with your tutor about what people who agree or disagree say about each position.

**Mind Map.** After reading a short section of the Easy Voter Guide, use this technique from LitStart, Strategy 25. Using the mind map technique, put your topic (it can be anything) in the center. Make branches off of the center to show related topics. For example, after reading the section on Proposition 1A from the May, 2009 election, a mind map might look like this:



**Follow the Results.** After voting, you can follow with your tutor the results of the elections in Sacramento or Washington, D.C. Bring in newspaper or magazine articles about the changes. You can also look at websites. A great website is the League of Women Voters <http://ca.lwv.org/>. This website will have a lot of information that you can look at to continue learning about the elections and how the voters' decisions have affected the state or the country.

## Writing Practice

**Pro & Con.** Using the Easy Voter Guide (EVG), choose an issue that is especially interesting to you. Read the arguments for or against the issue. With your tutor, divide a piece of paper in half and on one side list the reasons that people are for or “pro” the issue; then, on the other side of the paper, list the reasons that people are against or “con” on the issue.

**De-brief.** After voting, consider the following questions:

- How did it feel to vote?
- How did you make your decisions?
- If you are from another country, did you vote in your home country?
- If so, how is it different in the United States?
- What did you learn from voting?
- Do you plan to vote again?
- What did you learn about yourself when you voted?
- If you could tell someone else about the whole process, what would you say?

You can write your answers to these questions in a journal that will not be checked for spelling or grammar or anything, or you can discuss your responses with your tutor who can write down what you say as a language experience activity.

## Milestones

- **Initially** – Get the voter registration form to sign up to be a voter. Complete the form and send it in at least two weeks before the election.
- **Making Progress** – Collect elections materials and newspaper articles and begin reading through them. Begin to decide how you are going to vote.
- **Accomplished** – Finalize your decisions and mark your sample ballot. When you have voted by mail a week before Election Day or you have voted on Election Day at your polling place, you have accomplished your goal of voting. Congratulations again! You have now fulfilled one of your jobs as a citizen of this country.

### Contributor's Biography

**Ellen Loebel.** Ellen is a Literacy Specialist for Partners in Reading in San José. She likes to think of creative ways to teach reading and writing, including real-life goals. About five years ago she was the proof-reader for the Easy Voter Guide to help make it easier to read.

### Tips for Success

**Note to Tutor:** You may have a different opinion or may be of a different political party than your learner. Your job is to teach the process, the issues, and the candidates to be voted on. If your learner asks for your opinion, and you feel comfortable, explain what you would choose and why. However, if you feel very strongly about something, try to set that opinion aside so that you can explain in a neutral way both sides of an issue and let your learner decide what is best.

