

Running for Local Union Office: Instructions for Observers

1. Get there early—at least 30 minutes before the count.
2. Bring a pen and a notebook, plus any relevant reference material from your union on conducting local elections. Items to observe and be attentive to:
 - a. The name of each voting member
 - b. The names of the election committee personnel
 - c. The number of ballots received
 - d. The number of challenged ballots
 - e. A tally of the results
 - f. Anything unusual about the ballots or how they are handled
 - g. Your challenges and protests (if any)
3. Stand as close as possible. If they refuse to let you stand close enough to see, challenge all subsequent ballots.
4. Raise eligibility problems before the unmarked ballot envelopes are separated from the envelopes listing the voter's name.
5. If you think a voter is a retiree (and retirees do not have the right to vote in your local) or a member of management, challenge the ballot.
6. Challenge anything suspicious. You do not have to give a reason for challenging a ballot. You can withdraw a challenge later if your concern is resolved.
7. If the intent of a voter cannot be determined, challenge the ballot—wrongly marked ballots should not be placed in your opponent's pile.

Any challenged ballots should be set in a separate pile. These ballots should only be counted after the rest of the votes, if there are enough challenged ballots to affect the outcome.

8. Maintain the security of the ballots. The ballots should never be out of the observers' sight. Challenge any ballots that are removed from the room.
9. There should be a rule about what to do if a member marks a slate box, and then a box for an individual on another slate. In some unions, slate votes override any other votes. Ask the people running the election how this situation will be handled.
10. Other marks on a ballot should not void the ballot if the intent of the voter can be determined and secrecy is not compromised.
11. In mail-in elections, with duplicate ballots, the most common rule is that the ballot with the later postmark is the one to count. The other ballot should be voided. Whatever the rule used, it must be consistently applied.

12. Ballots with the outer label removed or obliterated should be voided.
13. Some people do not use the secret inner envelope. Many election supervisors say that this does not mean the ballot has to be voided. These envelopes can be dealt with carefully by having someone pull the ballot out face down and slide it towards someone else who immediately mixes it in with other ballots.

For more information, see the Department of Labor Fact Sheet: [Observer Rights and Responsibilities in Elections of Union Officers](#). ([PDF version here](#).)