

The Single Transferable Vote System

Running a Classroom Election

The people of Northern Ireland elect their MLAs using a method called Single Transferable Vote, or STV.

The STV system is easy for adults voting in an election to use. Voters choose the person – or candidate – they want to vote for by putting numbers beside their names on a ballot paper. They put 1 beside their favourite, 2 beside their second favourite and so on. The first six candidates to reach the targeted number of votes – or quota – are elected.

Although voters only have one vote, numbering their choice of candidates in order of preference allows their vote to be passed on from one candidate to another. For example, a voter's number 1 choice may not get elected because they don't have enough votes. However, the vote isn't lost because it is then passed onto the voter's number 2 choice and so on. This makes the most of each vote. It also makes sure the candidates elected represent the views of more voters.

Planning a Party

Voters vote for candidates in an election. Most candidates come from a political party. This is a group of people who share a similar point of view. Ask the children to work in groups to form their own political parties. Together they should decide who will be:

- Party Leader/Candidate;
- Press Officer; and
- Campaign Workers.

Each party should decide what point of view they would like to put forward. This may give the children ideas for their party name, for example The Free Sweets Party, The Rock and Roll Party, The 4-Day School Week Party or The PE for All Party.

They will need to create a campaign to tell voters about their party's point of view. The voters will want to know what each political party promises to do if they vote for their candidate. For example, The Free Sweets Party might promise:

- Free sweets for everyone;
- You will be allowed to eat during lessons; and
- You will have to go to the dentist once a month.

The members of the party should work together to create a:

- catchy party slogan that sums up what the party wants to achieve;
- party symbol; and
- party poster or leaflet listing the party promises.

The children should use the table in Resource 1 to record their party's decisions and explain the reasons for the choices that they made.



How to Fill in a Ballot Paper

Show the children the sample ballot paper in Resource 2. As a class, you should decide how to modify the form to suit your class election. For example, you may want to add in the names of the 'political parties' in your class, or add photographs of the candidates. When you have done this, print off copies for each pupil, so that they can vote.

The children should vote for the political party that they feel has the best things on offer. Remind them that they vote by putting numbers beside the names on the paper. They put 1 beside their favourite candidate, 2 beside their next choice of candidate and so on.

Explain the importance of not spoiling their ballot paper. A ballot paper is spoiled if voters:

- put the same number beside two candidates;
- put the same number twice against a candidate's name; or
- vandalise the paper, for example by drawing graffiti or scribbling on them.

A spoiled ballot paper is not counted. It is important for the children to complete their papers carefully so they do not lose their vote.

Election Day

This example shows a simplified model of how to run an election for a class of 30 children, with four candidates competing for two seats.

What is the quota?

The quota is the number of votes a candidate needs to get elected. It is calculated using the two equations in the formula below:

Equation 1: number of valid ballot papers \div (number of seats + 1) = ?

Equation 2: total of Equation 1 + 1 = the quota

$$30 \div 3 = 10$$

$$10 + 1 = 11$$

So the candidates need to get 11 votes to be elected.





First Count

Sort the ballot papers into different piles for each candidate. The ballot papers in each pile should have the number 1 marked beside the candidate's name. This means they have been given a first preference vote.

Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4
3	7	12	8

Candidate 3 has got enough votes to meet the quota of 11 so they are elected on the first count.

Second Count

Now take Candidate 3's pile of first preference ballot papers aside. Sort them into three new piles. The ballot papers in each pile should have the number 2 marked beside the name of the remaining candidates. This shows they have been given a second preference vote on the papers

Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 4
5	5	2

Add the first and second count results together.

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4
First Count	3	7	12	8
Second Count	5	5	0	2
Total	8	12	12	10

Candidate 2 now has enough votes to meet the quota of 11 so Candidate 2 is elected on the second count.





Resource 1: Party Planning

Use the table to record party decisions and give the reasons for your choices:

Party Details	
Party Name	
Our Party Beliefs	
Our Party Promises	
Party Slogan	
Party Symbol	





Resource 2: Ballot Paper Template

Use the instructions and layout from the template below to help develop a ballot paper for your class election. Add extra spaces if you have more candidates in your class.

DO NOT mark this ballot paper with an 'X'.

This election will be counted by the Single Transferable Vote (STV) method. This means that you can vote for more than one person/party, but you must number them in the order you prefer.

Please vote as follows:

- Write **1** in the box next to the candidate you want to elect as your first choice.
- Write **2** next to the candidate you want to elect as your second choice.
- Write **3** next to the candidate you elect in third place.

Continue until you have written a number beside everyone you want to vote for.

You may vote for as many or as few candidates as you want. However, do not write the same number more than once.

Candidate Name and Party	Candidate Photograph (Optional)	Order of Preference (1 for your favourite party and 4 for your least favourite)
Ballot paper identification number: (Optional)		

