

Each voter ranks as many of the candidates as they wish on voting day, and no candidate is able to win with less than half the total votes cast. So if the top candidate doesn't get a majority of votes in the first round of voting the lowest vote-getter is cut, the people who voted for that candidate get their ballots re-allocated to their second-place choices, and the totals are re-tallied; the process is repeated until there is a winner with a clear majority.

How preferences work

An election using the preferential system is just like holding several run-off elections until one candidate is the clear winner, preferred by the majority of the voters. But it's all done in one election on one ballot paper by simply listing our preferences 1, 2, 3 and so on.

In the Victorian Legislative Assembly (Lower House) each of the 88 Districts is represented by one MLA. But for the sake of clarity we'll use the same 4 candidates and the same 1000 voters as in the first example to see how that election might have turned out using preferential voting.

	First count	
Candidate	Votes	%
Andy	400	40
Jill	250	25
Lee	200	20
Joe	150	15
Total vote	1000	100

First count: After the first count Andy leads and Joe has the fewest votes so he is excluded. Joe is out of the race but watch how his preferences live on.

	First count		Joe's preferences		Second count	
Candidate	Votes	%	Prefs	%	Votes	%
Andy	400	40	20	2	420	42
Jill	250	25	30	3	280	28
Lee	200	20	100	10	300	30
Joe	150	15	--	--	--	--
Total vote	1000	100	150	15	1000	100

Second count: Joe's 150 votes are now distributed according to their second preference. 100 of the people who voted **1** for Joe voted **2** for Lee (their second preference) and this has pushed Lee into second place with 300 votes.

Andy has received 20 of Joe's second preferences bringing his total to 420 and Jill has received 30 <https://remote.pridetoronto.com/owa/> bringing her total to 280.

No candidate yet has a majority (at least 50% + 1) so Jill, with the fewest votes, will be the next to be excluded.

	Second count		Jill's preferences		Third count	
Candidate	Votes	%	Prefs	%	Votes	%
Andy	420	42	40	4	460	46
Jill	280	28	--	--	--	--
Lee	300	30	240	24	540	54

Joe	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total vote	1000	100	280	28	1000	100

Third count: Jill is out of the election ... or is she? Watch how her preferences now decides who wins. 240 of the people who voted **1** for Jill voted **2** for Lee (their second preference) and these preferences have pushed Lee over the line with 54% of the vote. She is the winner even though she started with just 20% of the primary vote! And she owes her win to Joe's and Jill's preferences. Note that Jill's 250 primary votes were distributed according to their second preference. The 30 votes she aquired as Joe's second preference, were distributed according to their third preference. None of Jill's second preferences were directed to Joe but if any had been they too would have been distributed according to their third preference. That's because Joe was already excluded and his second preferences had already been distributed. The aim of the preferential voting system is to ensure that the candidate *most preferred* by the *most voters* does, in fact, get elected. Whether or not you agree that it achieves that result, hopefully you will now understand *how preferences work* and how vitally important it is to choose them very carefully.