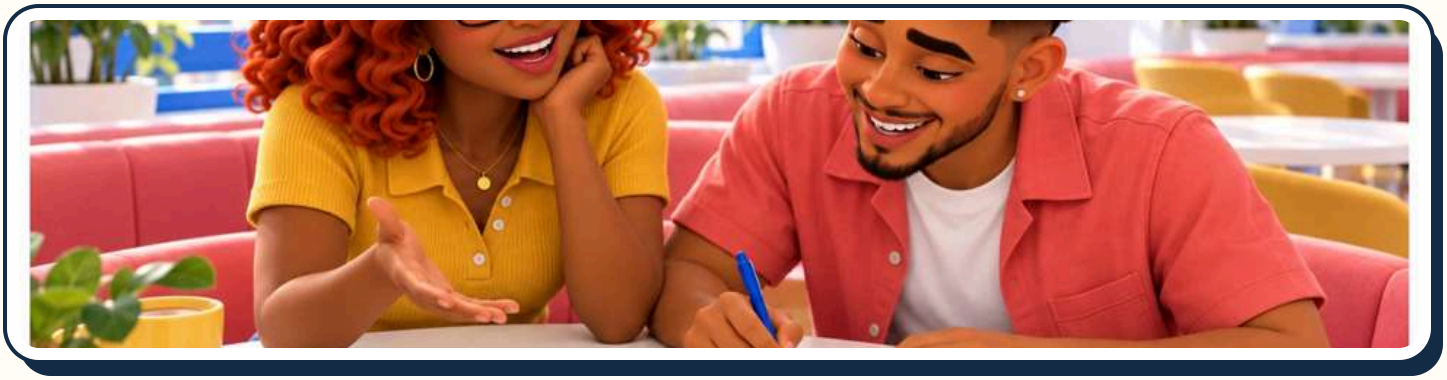
Case 9: What is on your ballot, and where do you check?

Dec turns 18 before the election on November 3, 2026, and his feed covers only one race on his ballot.

On your own Read What happened. Underline the contests Mateo finds below the big race. About 6 minutes.

Your role: You're the one who finds Dec's official sample ballot before anyone tells him how to vote.
New skill: Check an official source for your own area.



Mateo and Gia work in a notebook at a café table.

What happened

It is Sunday at the library desk. Dec turns 18 in October, before the general election on November 3, 2026. His feed is full of posts about one big race. Mateo and Gia are helping him find out what else is on his ballot.

They look at a sample ballot for the November election. The front shows the big race from Dec's feed. The second page has more: a school board race, a city council seat and Measure T, a transit bond. Mateo notices that nobody is posting about Measure T.

A creator's voter guide is also going around. It says registration closes "the 14th," but it never names a state. It also tells people how to vote on the school board race and Measure T. Gia is writing a reminder for the group chat.

Mateo has his own problem. He may still be registered at his mom's address in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Dec says he does not need anyone to pick for him. He needs to know what is on his ballot and whether he is registered in time.

Your question: What is on Dec's ballot, and where should he check his own information?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example. Then write your first guess in the box. About 6 minutes.

Sample ballot A sample ballot is a preview of the contests and measures that will appear on your ballot.

En español: boleta de muestra

In this case: Dec's sample ballot lists a school board race, a city council seat and Measure T below the big race from his feed.

Voter guide A voter guide is a document that explains or recommends choices in an election.

En español: guía para votantes

In this case: A creator's voter guide mixes one deadline with two picks: "vote Candidate B" and "Measure T: yes, obviously."

Registration Registration is signing up with your election office so that you are on the list of people who can vote.

En español: inscripción electoral

In this case: Dec turns 18 in October and needs to know whether he is registered in time. The guide's deadline names no state.

Jurisdiction A jurisdiction is the place or area where a particular government or rule has authority.

En español: jurisdicción

In this case: Mateo may still be registered in New Bedford, Massachusetts. A different place can mean a different ballot and a different deadline.

Who is involved

Mateo
Helping Dec read the sample ballot

"Dec's feed is all the big race. Then you flip the sample ballot: school board, city council, a transit bond. Nobody's posting about Measure T."

Gia
Writing the group-chat reminder

"The creator's guide says 'registration closes the 14th.' Whose 14th? It doesn't even say which state."

Your first guess

Before you look at the evidence, what do you think is on Dec's ballot?

I think Dec's ballot has ___ because ___.

Notes

Reading passage

Flip the ballot over

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 4 minutes.

Words to know

- **Sample ballot**: A sample ballot is a preview of the contests and measures that will appear on your ballot.
- **Voter guide**: A voter guide is a document that explains or recommends choices in an election.
- **Registration**: Registration is signing up with your election office so that you are on the list of people who can vote.
- **Jurisdiction**: A jurisdiction is the place or area where a particular government or rule has authority.
- **Claim**: A claim is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence.
- **Material connection**: A material connection is a relationship with a brand, like payment or a free product, that viewers might not expect.

The story: More than one race

It is Sunday at the library desk. Dec turns 18 in October, before the general election on November 3, 2026. His feed is full of posts about one big race. Mateo and Gia are helping him find out what else is on his ballot.

They look at a sample ballot. The front shows the big race from Dec's feed. Then Mateo flips it over. The second page has a school board race, a city council seat and Measure T, a transit bond. "Nobody's posting about Measure T," Mateo says.

A creator's voter guide is going around too. It says registration closes "the 14th." It never says which state. It also tells people how to vote on the school board race and Measure T.

Dec is clear about what he wants. "I don't need someone picking for me," he says. He needs to know what is on his ballot and whether he is registered in time. Your job is to find his official sample ballot before anyone tells him how to vote.

Stop and think. Why might a feed show only one race when the ballot has five or more?

Facts, picks and your own address

A **sample ballot** is a preview of the contests and measures that will appear on your ballot. A **voter guide** is a document that explains or recommends choices in an election. The two do different jobs. Start with the sample ballot. Then check a guide's facts apart from its picks.

In Case 1, you learned that a **claim** can be checked with evidence. "Registration closes the 14th" is a claim. But the 14th of what month, in which state? Gia asks, "Whose 14th?" The picks, like "Measure T: yes, obviously," are opinions, not facts.

In Case 8, you learned to ask about a **material connection**, a relationship with a brand, like payment or a free product, that viewers might not expect. The guide never says who wrote it or who pays for it. That is worth asking.

Your address decides which contests appear on your ballot. A **jurisdiction** is the place or area where a particular government or rule has authority. Mateo realizes he may still be registered at his mom's address in New Bedford, Massachusetts. His ballot and deadline could be different from Dec's. **Registration** is signing up with your election office so that you are on the list of people who can vote.

Stop and think. Which lines in the creator's guide are facts you can check, and which are picks?

How voting rules really work

The Twenty-Sixth Amendment protects the right to vote for citizens 18 and older (National Constitution Center, no date listed). Rules for registering differ by state. Most states let teens preregister before they turn 18 (Ballotpedia News, September 26, 2025). Gia's reminder for the group chat sends everyone to Vote.gov to check their own registration and sample ballot.

Stop and think. Why could Mateo's ballot be different from Dec's?

Sources

Real source | National Constitution Center | No date listed

The 26th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

Real source | Ballotpedia News | September 26, 2025

Most states allow teenagers to pre-register to vote before turning 18, and some let them vote in primaries

Real source | Vote.gov | No date listed

Your state or territory's voting information

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document. For each one, write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 12 minutes.

Evidence A | Sample ballot

Sample ballot for the November general election

Federal: U.S. Representative. State: State Senator; Superior Court judge (retention). Local: Board of Education, District 3 (vote for two); City Council, Ward 5. Measures: Measure T, transit improvements bond.

Look closely: Which contests sit below the big race, and which one touches Dec's school?

What it shows

One question I still have

Evidence B | Voter guide post

A creator's voter guide

All you need for November!! Registration closes the 14th. School board: vote Candidate B, the only one who cares about students. Measure T: yes, obviously.

Look closely: Which line could you check, and which lines tell you how to vote?

What it shows

One question I still have

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | **Group-chat draft**

Gia's reminder

Check your registration and your own sample ballot at vote.gov. Deadlines depend on your state. Please don't post your address here.

Look closely: What does Gia share, and what does she ask friends to keep private?

What it shows

One question I still have

What is still missing from the evidence?

Notes

Key idea: sample ballots

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics. Then answer the question in the box. About 8 minutes.

A **sample ballot** is a preview of the contests and measures that will appear on your ballot. A measure is a question that voters decide directly, such as Measure T. A **voter guide** is a document that explains or recommends choices in an election. The two have different purposes. Start with the ballot for your address, and then check a guide's facts apart from its picks.

Your address decides which contests appear on your ballot. A **jurisdiction** is the place or area where a particular government or rule has authority. A friend two districts over may see different local races. A school board and a city council have different jobs, so each one makes different decisions. Before you research candidates, find out which office has power over the issue you care about.

Registration is signing up with your election office so that you are on the list of people who can vote. Rules and deadlines vary by state, so do not copy a friend's deadline. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment protects the right to vote for citizens 18 and older. Most states let people preregister before they turn 18. Several states let 17-year-olds vote in a primary if they will be 18 by the general election.

Professional standards

Real source | **Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)**

SPJ Code of Ethics: Seek Truth and Report It

"Label advocacy and commentary."

In plain words: Journalists who follow the SPJ code mark opinions and recommendations so readers can tell them apart from facts.

Question: The creator's guide mixes a registration deadline with "vote Candidate B." Which lines are checkable facts, and which are picks?

Your answer

A fact I can check is ___. A pick is ___.

In the news

Real source | NPR | August 6, 2023

Some states are trying to boost youth voter registration. Here's what they're doing

Explains preregistration and other state steps that let teens sign up before they turn 18.

Real source | Ballotpedia News | September 26, 2025

Most states allow teenagers to pre-register to vote before turning 18, and some let them vote in primaries

Rules differ by state, so where you live decides when you can register and what you vote on.

Notes

Sort the evidence

On your own Match each of Dec's questions to the rule or office that answers it. Then write whose view is missing. About 8 minutes.

Separate the two questions Dec has: what is on his ballot, and can he vote. Which rules and offices answer each, and which source should he check first?

Which contests and measures appear on Dec's ballot

Who decides

His address and district lines, drawn through redistricting

Under which rule

Who lives with it

Your way in

Whether Dec can register and vote in November

Who decides

Under which rule

Twenty-Sixth Amendment: the vote at 18 cannot be denied on account of age

State rules on preregistration, deadlines and 17-year-old primary voting

Who lives with it

Your way in

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is ___. I would ask ___.

Notes

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what you would do with a friend's sample ballot. Then fix the two marked phrases. About 8 minutes.

You live at a new address. A friend sends their sample ballot and says, "Just use this one." What should you do?

- ☐ **A** Use it, because you and your friend live in the same state.
- ☐ **B** Check your registration and find the official sample ballot for your address.
- ☐ **C** Use a creator's voter guide instead, since it covers the whole election.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

Guys the election is coming up and it's a big one!! ❶ Registration closes on the 14th so do it now. Here's the voter guide I use, it tells you exactly who to vote for so you don't have to research. Also ❷ drop your addresses and I'll check if you're registered for you. Only the big race really matters anyway, the rest is small stuff. My cousin in another state said the same deadline works for her too, so just use mine. Let's go vote!!

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

Grades 6—8

Your task

On your own Read the steps. Fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft.

Match offices on a sample ballot to the everyday things they decide, then make a poster for families about finding their own ballot.

Use: A sample ballot and one-line office descriptions.

You'll make: Matching sheet plus a poster

Time: 45 minutes

1. Read the sample ballot in Evidence A. Circle three contests at the state or local level.
2. Match each circled contest to something it decides. Use the office cards.
3. Read Gia's reminder in Evidence C. Find where a family gets its own ballot.
4. Write your poster text in the Your draft box, 3 to 5 sentences.
5. Add one sentence on why a friend's ballot might look different.
6. Check that your poster does not tell anyone how to vote.

Show it your way

Write it: Write 3 sentences with the frame "The __ decides __. To find your ballot, __."

Say it: Explain to a partner which office on the sample ballot decides something about your school, and how a family can find its own ballot.

Show it: Make the family poster: three offices, each with a picture of what it decides, plus the steps to find your own ballot.

Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Your task, continued

Board of Education, District 3, decides:

Measure T asks voters about:

U.S. Representative votes on:

Where a family finds its own ballot

Your draft

Your poster text, 3 to 5 sentences

The ___ decides ___. To find your ballot, ___.

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions and mark your level in each rubric row. Then write one change you made. About 5 minutes.

Does your poster match at least three contests to what they decide?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it send families to vote.gov or their election office?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it avoid telling anyone how to vote?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it say why a friend's ballot might differ?	☐ Yes	☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ Copies one person's deadlines.	☐ Mentions official sources vaguely.	☐ Points to official sources for each person's state.	☐ Points to official sources and explains why rules differ.
Reasoning	☐ Treats a guide as the ballot.	☐ Mentions the ballot but not local contests.	☐ Separates ballot, guide and registration.	☐ Explains why local offices matter to the audience.
Audience & purpose	☐ Collects private info.	☐ Generic hype.	☐ Useful, private, nonpartisan.	☐ Includes people not yet eligible.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Adds a link.	☐ Replaces copied deadlines with official routes.	☐ Explains how each change helps friends in different situations.

Check your work, continued

One change I made

I changed ___ because ___.

Notes

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question. Then finish My take. About 10 minutes.

1 **Which contest on the sample ballot could affect Dec's school or his bus?**

2 **Mateo may still be registered in New Bedford. Why might his ballot differ from Dec's?**

3 **Anika is 16. How can she be part of this election before she can vote?**

My take

I think Dec should ___ because ___.

The evidence that changed my first guess is ___.

One question I still have is ___.

Talk about this case at home

Case 9: What is on your ballot, and where do you check?

In this case, a teen about to turn 18 finds local races on his ballot that his feed never mentions. Your student compared a sample ballot with a voter guide, then wrote a guide that points to official sources without telling anyone how to vote.

See the case online.

Questions to talk about

1. What offices appear on a local ballot, besides the big races?
2. Where can someone find official information about registering to vote?
3. How can you tell a fact in a voter guide from a recommendation?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.