

# Signature Verification Training

Signatures on Petitions and  
Ballot Envelopes

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Provided by the Secretary of State and  
CACEO

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# Signature Verification Training Requirement

The requirement for this training is found in the California Code of Regulations:

**Section 20962 provides:**

“The Secretary of State shall, in coordination with county elections officials, provide a yearly training program for elections officials and staff who are responsible for the signature verification process.”

Section 20962 is found in Title 2, Division 7, Chapter 8.3 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR)

# This training will cover these topics:

- Signature verification should be **liberally construed** in favor of the vote-by-mail voter
- Signatures shall be **compared**; an exact match is not necessary
- The Elections Code and California Code of Regulations consider
  - signatures change over time, and
  - the haste with which a signature is written
- Signature stamps
- Signature verification technology and manual comparison
- Rejection of signatures

# Liberal Construe in Favor of the Voter



When verifying a voter's signature on a vote-by-mail ballot identification envelope, signature verification statement, or unsigned identification envelope, **the elections official shall liberally construe the verification in favor of the voter.**

(Elec. Code, § 3000)

# General Considerations

When verifying a voter's signature on a petition, ballot envelope (provisional, conditional voter registration (CVR), or vote-by-mail), signature verification statement, or unsigned identification envelope, the elections official:

- Must seek to eliminate the visibility of identifying information (CCR § 20960(b))
- Shall not review or consider a voter's party preference, race, or ethnicity (Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(D), CCR § 20960(b))
- Shall presume the signature is valid (Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(A), CCR § 20960(c))

# Signature Comparison



- Signatures shall be “compared” to the signatures in a voter’s registration record (Elec. Code, § 3019(a), CCR 20960(a))
- The voter’s registration record contains the signature of the voter from:
  - their voter registration affidavit, and
  - any signatures appearing on a form issued by an elections official that contains the voter’s signature
- Facsimiles of voters’ signatures may be used for signature comparison, provided that the method of preparing and displaying the facsimiles complies with the law (Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(F))

# Signature Comparison (cont'd)



- Exact matches are not required for an elections official to confirm a valid signature
  - **Similar characteristics** between a signature being compared and any signature in the voter's registration record are sufficient to determine a signature is valid  
(Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(B), CCR § 20960(d),(e))
- When evaluating signatures, elections officials may review:
  - using broad characteristics to evaluate an entire signature as a unit, or
  - narrow the scope of their examination to that of specific letters within a signature  
(CCR § 20960(k))

# Signature Comparison Characteristics

## Characteristics to Consider when Visually Comparing Signatures

- Slant of the signature
- Signature is printed or in cursive
- Size, proportions, or scale
- Individual characteristics, such as how the “t’s” are crossed, “i’s” are dotted, or loops are made on the letters f, g, j, y, or z
- Spacing between the letters within the first and/or last name and between first and last name
- Line direction
- Letter formations
- Proportion or ratio of the letters in the signature
- Initial strokes and connecting strokes of the signature
- Similar endings such as an abrupt end, a long tail, or loop back around
- Speed of the writing
- Presence or absence of pen lifts
- Misspelled names  
(Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(E), CCR § 20960(f))



# Considerations for Discrepancies in Signatures



The elections officials shall consider as explanations for the following discrepancies in signatures:

- Evidence of trembling or shaking in a signature could be health-related or the result of aging
- The voter may have used a variation of their full legal name, including, but not limited to:
  - the use of initials, or
  - the rearrangement of components of their full legal name, such as:
    - a reversal of first and last names,
    - use of a middle name in place of a first name, or
    - omitting a second last name

# Considerations for Discrepancies in Signatures (cont'd)



- The voter's signature style may have changed over time
- The signature may have been written in haste
- A signature in the voter's registration file may have been written with a stylus pen or other electronic signature tool that may result in a thick or fuzzy quality
- The surface of the location where the signature was made may have been hard, soft, uneven, or unstable

(Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(C), (H), CCR § 20960(g))

# Additional Signature Comparison Factors

The elections official may also consider factors applicable to a particular voter, such as:

- the age of the voter
- the age of the signature(s) contained in the voter's record
- the possibility that the voter is disabled
- the voter's primary language
- the quality of any digitized signature(s) contained in the voter's record

(CCR § 20960(h))

# Signature Stamps

A signature made using a mark such as an “X”, or made by a signature stamp shall be presumed valid, and shall be accepted if the signature meets the requirements of Elections Code section 354.5.

(Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(I), CCR § 20960(I))



## Elections Code section 354.5 provides:

(a) “Signature” includes either of the following:

(1) A person’s mark if the name of the person affixing the mark is written near the mark by a witness over 18 years of age designated by the person and the designee subscribes his or her own name as a witness thereto. For purposes of this paragraph, a signature stamp may be used as a mark, provided that the authorized user complies with the provisions of this paragraph.

(2) An impression made by the use of a signature stamp pursuant to the requirements specified in subdivision (c).

(b) A mark attested as provided in paragraph (1) of subdivision (a), or an impression made by a signature stamp as provided in paragraph (2) of subdivision (a), may serve as a signature for any purpose specified in this code, including a sworn statement.

(c) An authorized user of a signature stamp may use it to affix a signature to a document or writing any time that a signature is required by this code, provided that all of the following conditions, as applicable, are met:

(1) A signature stamp used to obtain a ballot or vote by mail ballot in any local, state, or federal election shall be used only by the authorized user of that signature stamp.

(2) A signature stamp shall be affixed by the authorized user in the presence of the Secretary of State, his or her designee, the local elections official, or his or her designee, to obtain a ballot, in any local, state, or federal election unless the authorized user of the signature stamp votes by vote by mail ballot. If the owner of a signature stamp votes by vote by mail ballot, he or she shall affix the signature stamp on the identification envelope in accordance with Section 3019.

(d) A signature affixed with a signature stamp by an authorized user in accordance with this section shall be treated in the same manner as a signature made in writing.

(e) A registered voter or any person who is eligible to vote, who qualifies as an authorized user pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (f), may use a signature stamp only after he or she first submits his or her affidavit of registration or a new affidavit of registration by one of the following means:

(1) Using the signature stamp to sign the affidavit in the presence of a county elections official.

(2) Submitting an affidavit pursuant to Section 2196 that utilizes a signature stamp that has been approved by the Department of Motor Vehicles and transmitted to the Secretary of State.

(f) The following definitions apply for purposes of this section:

(1) “Authorized user” means either of the following:

(A) A person with a disability who, by reason of that disability, is unable to write and who owns a signature stamp.

(B) A person using the signature stamp on behalf of the owner of the stamp with the owner’s express consent and in the presence of the owner.

(2) “Disability” means a medical condition, mental disability, or physical disability, as those terms are defined in subdivisions (i), (j), and (l) of Section 12926 of the Government Code.

(3) “Signature stamp” means a stamp that contains the impression of any of the following:

(A) The actual signature of a person with a disability.

(B) A mark or symbol that is adopted by the person with the disability.

(C) A signature of the name of a person with a disability that is made by another person and is adopted by the person with the disability.

# Signature Verification Technology



If an elections official uses signature verification technology to compare the signature on a vote-by-mail ballot identification envelope to the signature(s) in the voter's registration file,

- and the technology rejects the signature,
- the elections official shall **manually compare the signature and**
- the signature can only be rejected if **two additional elections officials** each find beyond a reasonable doubt
  - the signature differs in multiple, significant, and obvious respects from all signatures in the voter's registration record

(Elec. Code, § 3019(a)(2)(G), (c)(2), CCR § 20961)

# Rejection of Signatures



First step:

- If upon conducting the comparison of signatures the elections official determines
  - the signature possesses multiple, significant, and obvious differing characteristics when compared to all signatures in the voter's registration record,
  - **the signature is subject to additional review**

(Elec. Code, § 3019(c)(1), CCR § 20960(i))

# Rejection of Signatures (cont'd)



## Second step:

- If the elections official makes the determination that the signature does not compare to all signatures in the voter's registration record:
  - two additional elections officials must each find beyond a reasonable doubt
    - the signature differs in multiple, significant, and obvious respects from all signatures in the voter's registration record
- **Only then shall the signature be rejected**

(Elec. Code, § 3019(c)(2), CCR § 20960(j))



# Resources and Contact

## Resources:

The regulations can be found on the Secretary of State's office at <https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations>

## Secretary of State contact:

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