

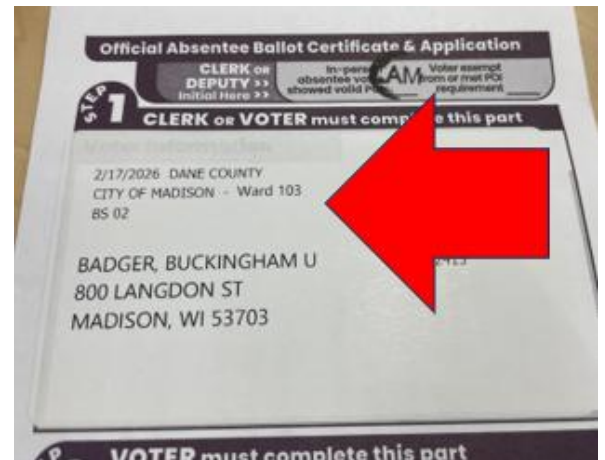
Quick Guide to Processing Absentee Ballots

Revised 02/2026

Two officials should be involved any time we are dealing with voted ballots. When opening a package of absentees, write the container or envelope seal number(s) and time on the Absentee Inspectors' Statement Events log and on the seal log.

1. Sort absentee envelopes

a) **Check the ward number** to make sure the ballots are at the right polling place. The label on each envelope lists the ward number. If a ballot was delivered to the wrong polling place, call the Clerk's Office at (608) 266-4220. Record this on your Absentee Diary of Events.



b) **Make sure envelopes are sealed with no evidence of tampering.** If an envelope is not sealed or there is evidence of tampering, reject the absentee. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.

- ✓ *Some voters tape envelopes before placing them in the mail, that is okay.*
- ✓ *If an envelope is not completely sealed, determine whether someone could have tampered with the ballot.*

c) **Check certificates for voter and witness signatures.** Each certificate must have the signature (or mark) of the voter and the voter's witness. If either of these signatures are missing, reject the absentee. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.

- ✓ *Signatures do not need to be legible.*

d) **Check certificates for printed witness name.** Each certificate must have the witness's name printed under the witness signature. If the printed name is missing, reject the absentee. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.

e) Check certificates for witness address. Look at the envelope. Does it provide enough information that the City Clerk could determine where to communicate with the witness? If so, the witness' address is complete.

- ✓ *The name of a dorm and room number instead of a street address is complete.*
- ✓ *The witness may have used a common abbreviation for their street name or city, like Willy St, E. Wash, or Mdsn.*
- ✓ *A zip code could be listed instead of the name of a city.*
- ✓ *"Same address as above" or "same address as voter" is a complete address.*
- ✓ *An arrow between the witness address line and the voter's address is complete.*

If there is no witness address, reject the absentee. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.

f) Check names against ineligible list. Contact the Chief Inspector if an absentee voter is on the ineligible list for your ward.

2. Check absentees into the poll book

a) Take at least three absentee certificates at a time. Stand in line to check the absentee voters into the poll book.

b) Announce each absentee voter's name and address at the poll book.

Observers must be able to hear the names and addresses.

- If absentee voter is not found on poll book, check the supplemental poll list. The voter had to be registered for the Clerk's Office to generate the absentee label. If a voter's name is not on the poll book, call the Clerk's Office at (608) 266-4220.

c) Assign next sequential voter slip for that ward. The voter number is written in the poll book, followed by "A" for absentee. Write the voter number in the upper right corner of the absentee certificate envelope, too. This helps with reconciliation if your numbers do not balance at the end of the night.

3. Open certificate envelopes

a) Carefully open certificate envelope. If the ballot is torn, set it aside to remake.

b) Remove ballot from certificate envelope. Protect the secrecy of the ballot.

Once the ballot is out of the envelope, there should be no way to know which voter cast that ballot.

- If envelope contains more than one marked ballot, **both ballots** must be rejected. Using tape, reseal ballots in the certificate envelope. Set aside the certificate envelope for rejection. Write on the Absentee Inspectors' Statement Events log you issued one more voter slip than ballots counted.
- If envelope contains a marked ballot and a blank ballot, process the marked ballot. Seal the unmarked ballot in the certificate envelope.

4. Put the empty certificate envelopes in the large white bin with the “Used Absentee Certificates” envelope. At the end of the night, at least 3 election officials will need to sign the “**Used Absentee Certificates**” envelope inside the bin. The empty envelopes should be in alphabetical order and rubber banded by the end of the night.

4. Unfold, flatten, and examine ballots

- a) Completely remove absentee ballots** from their envelopes. You should not be able to associate a voter name or number with any ballot. Unfold at least three ballots at a time to protect the secrecy of each ballot.
- b) Flatten ballots** as much as possible.
- c) Check ballots for initials.** Check for Clerk's initials under “Absent Elector's Ballot Issued by.” If initials are missing, make a note on the Absentee Diary of Events e.g. “Absentee ballot missing Clerks initials. Processed ballot.” You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number for that ballot.
- d) Watch for absentee ballots marked with green or red pens.** The tabulator may not read these marks correctly. If a ballot is marked with a green or red

The image shows two forms. The top form is titled "Official Absentee Ballot Certificate & Application" and "Absentee Bundle". It contains fields for "CLERK or VOTER must complete this form", "259A", "HARPER, FANNIE LOU", "244 W LAKELAWN PL", "MADISON, WI 53706", and "244 W LAKELAWN PL Madison WI". The bottom form is a "WITNESS REQUIRED" statement with a signature line for "Vernin Dalmer" and a printed name "Vernin Dalmer". It also includes a "Witness Address" field with "244 W Lakelawn Pl Madison WI".

pen, set it aside to remake with Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number for that ballot.

e) Watch for creatively marked ballots. If the voter circled, underlined, crossed out, or erased marks on the ballot, set it aside to remake. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number for that ballot.

f) Watch for over-voted ballots. If the voter selected too many candidates for one office, set ballot aside to remake. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number for that ballot.

5. Insert absentee ballots into tabulator. If an absentee voter did not select any candidates, the tabulator will alert you that the ballot is blank. If the ballot really is blank, use the touchscreen to verify that you want to “cast blank ballot.” Document this on the incident log. If the tabulator kicks out a ballot for another reason, set the ballot aside to remake. Absentee ballots are never rejected once they are out of the envelope. We only reject certificate envelopes.

6. Reconcile absentee numbers throughout the day. Chief Inspectors have access to absentees issued and returned totals in their Teams channel when the polls open and data are updated close to polls closing. The AM absentee courier delivery container also includes the most up to date absentee log with all recorded issued and returned absentees as of the night before the election. You must reconcile the number of absentees processed at the polling places during Election Day against the returned absentee numbers.

Voters at the polling place could jump to the conclusion that you are personally casting three ballots. For greater transparency, wear a name badge that says you are processing absentees).

