

Tips to Advocate for Yourself at the Polls

Voting is your right and responsibility in our democracy. Your vote is your voice on issues affecting you and every American. When you vote in a government election, you are choosing who you would like to represent you—and how our government is run. When everyone who can vote votes, our leaders can better represent our ideas and interests. Your opinion matters—and your vote matters.

The process of voting might seem overwhelming. It doesn't have to be. Knowledge is power, and the more you know, the better you will be able to advocate for yourself—and your right to vote—this election season.

To help you make your voice heard about decisions that affect our government, here are 10 tips to help you feel empowered as you head to the polls in November:

1. **Understand your options beforehand:** Consider calling your local elections office to understand the voting options available to voters with disabilities. Ask questions about the accessibility of the machines and other voting methods. You can also review the ballot in advance. You can find your ballot at <https://www.headcount.org/your-ballot/>. By preparing in advance, you will feel more comfortable on the day you arrive.
2. **Bring a support person:** You don't need to do this alone. Bring a friend, family member, or support person to help you through the process. This person can come into the booth to help you understand the ballot and use the machine.
3. **Introduce yourself:** When you arrive, tell the poll workers who you are, where you're from, and what you need from them. Remember, these people are volunteers from all walks of life. They may have never met or worked with anyone with a disability. By talking to them about your disability and your needs, you not only make the whole process easier on you, but you also educate them about how they can help others with disabilities.
4. **When in doubt, make small talk—or a joke:** Talking to someone new can be overwhelming, and you may feel uncomfortable, particularly if you sense that the poll worker is also uncomfortable. That's okay! You can lighten the mood by talking about something light and fun, like your favorite sports team, a movie you watched recently, or a joke that made you laugh.
5. **Know what to ask for:** The poll worker is there to help you with things like reading the voting forms and using the machines. They are not allowed to ask you about your disability, talk to you about who you are voting for, stop you from voting, or stop you from bringing a support person with you. They are there to make it as easy on you as possible. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
6. **Challenge yourself to stay even if you want to leave:** You may feel uncomfortable when you're there and you may be tempted to turn around and walk back out the door. But voting is your right, and your voice needs to be heard. Don't leave. If you feel anxious or nervous, you can always ask for help. And remember, there's no rush. Take as much time as you need.
7. **Don't be afraid to talk to someone else:** While most people tend to show common courtesy and kindness, not everyone will. If one person is rude or disrespectful, find someone else to talk to. There will always be somebody there who is more than willing to help you and make you feel comfortable.
8. **Try to be as independent as possible:** You may find that your poll worker wants to step in and do more for you than what you need, like come into the booth with you. If that is the case, kindly tell them that you would like to do it yourself—and that if you need help you will let them know.

9. **Follow up with the elections office after you vote:** Another way to make your voice heard is to tell your election officials about your personal experience with the actual voting process. Their goal is to make voting accessible and easy for everyone. When you tell them about your own experience with voting, whether it was a good experience or a bad one, you help them make sure that the right improvements are being made so voting can be more accessible to all.
10. **Stay informed and get involved:** After you vote, sign up for emails and other alerts so that you can stay connected with your local elections office. The more you know, the more empowered you will feel to speak up on any issue or cause that is important to you as it comes up.

Remember, when it comes to exercising your right to vote, you are no different than anyone else. You may need different accommodations, but your vote matters just as much as the next person's. As members of society, we all face the same overarching issues. Be sure to get to the booth and cast your vote this election season.