



Easy Voter Guide

Civic Participation and Equipped for the Future Activities

Note to tutors: This section combines tutoring tips for engaging students in civic participation with the Equipped for the Future framework for Adult Education. Please choose the areas that would be most helpful to your students and adapt them as you see fit. Enjoy!

Introduction

Let's use Sharon as an example. Here is her story.

Sharon decides she wants to vote. She has never voted before, she is not registered, she is scared of the process, and she doesn't know when the election will be held or what to vote on. She thinks voting is like a test and she is going to fail it. Let's help her out with the tools available to us: the Easy Voter Guide, registration form, and Sample Ballot, as well as the Equipped for the Future framework for adult education.

Equipped for the Future looks not just at how adult students perform, but how all adults perform. The EFF tools (Purposes, Roles, Standards, and Common Activities) can all be used to help Sharon get comfortable with the voting process.

I. Using the 4 Purposes for civic education

Purposes: Many adults come to literacy programs with one or more of the 4 purposes listed below in mind.

ACCESS: To gain access to information and resources so that adults can orient themselves in the world

VOICE: To express ideas and opinions with the confidence they will be heard and taken into account

ACTION: To solve problems and make decisions without having to rely on others to mediate the world for them

BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE: Learning to learn so that adults can be prepared to keep up with the world as it changes





Sharon isn't happy with her legislators. She wants to make some changes. Voting is a great way to do that.

- How can voting give you a voice?
- What do you need to know to have a voice?
- What do you do if you have a quiet voice and other people have louder voices?
- What are some of the things you worry about in using your voice?
- If you use your voice as a voter, what other ways do you think you will use your voice in the future? How can you use your voice at work? How can you use your voice at home? What do you need to know how to do before you use your voice in those other ways?

Let's look closely at Voice as it relates to voting.

II. Using the Citizen Role for civic education

Effective citizens and community members take informed action to make a positive difference in their lives, communities, and world.

| BROAD AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
|  |  |  |  |
| <p>Become and Stay Informed</p> <p>Citizens and community members find and use information to identify and solve problems and contribute to the community</p> | <p>Form and Express Opinions and Ideas</p> <p>Citizens and community members develop a personal voice and use it individually and as a group</p> | <p>Work Together</p> <p>Citizens and community members interact with other people to get things done toward a common purpose</p> | <p>Take Action to Strengthen Communities</p> <p>Citizens and community members exercise their rights and responsibilities as individuals and as members of groups to improve the world around them</p> |
| KEY ACTIVITIES | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, monitor, and anticipate problems, community needs, strengths, and resources for yourself and others • Recognize and understand human, legal, and civic rights and responsibilities for yourself and others • Figure out how the system that affects an issue works • Identify how to have an impact and recognize that individuals can make a difference • Find, interpret, analyze, and use diverse sources of information, including personal experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen and express a sense of self that reflects personal history, values, beliefs, and roles in the larger community • Learn from others' experiences and ideas • Communicate so that others understand • Reflect on and reevaluate your own opinions and ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get involved in the community and get others involved • Respect others and work to eliminate discrimination and prejudice • Define common values, visions, and goals • Manage and resolve conflict • Participate in group processes and decision making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help yourself and others • Educate others • Influence decision makers and hold them accountable • Provide leadership within the community |

Please visit http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff_comm.html for more information.

Many adult students throughout the country have said that they have 3 roles in their adult lives: parent/family member, worker, and citizen/community member. These roles influence how adults spend their time.

Let's look at the citizen/community member role map as it relates to voting. Sharon wants to take part in her community by voting. She is not sure how to begin.

What do effective citizens and community members do? Why do they do that? How do they do that? Find one or two places in the Broad Areas of Responsibility that relate to voting. Which are the most important areas? Now that you have selected an





area (or two), look in the Key Activities below those areas. Choose one area to talk about. (If you are working with a group of students, you can choose more than one area and talk about how to do those things).

Example: Choose “Become and Stay Informed” and then below that “Identify how to have an impact and recognize that individuals can make a difference.” Many people, especially adult students, say that their vote doesn’t count, which is why they choose not to vote. This statement disagrees. How can you get informed and vote so that your vote does make a difference?

- Research different parties
- Find out who your legislators are
- Find out what your legislators stand for
- Contact their offices — send an email or a letter, call them, meet them, tell them what is important to you
- Register to vote
- Vote in each election
- Encourage friends and family to vote

III. Using the Common Activities for civic education

Common activities may be interesting to look at also in terms of voting.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| 10 | <p>COMMON ACTIVITY Exercise Rights and Responsibilities</p> | <p>EFF STANDARDS</p> |
|  | <p>Act and advocate on behalf of yourself and others, taking into account laws, social standards, and cultural traditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and assume your share of family, civic, and work responsibilities • Monitor and keep up to date on federal, state, and local laws and regulations • Make sure your own behavior is just and responsible • Take personal responsibility to bring about change or resolve problems to achieve a common good | <p>Communication Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read with understanding • Convey ideas in writing • Speak so others can understand • Listen actively • Observe critically <p>Decision-Making Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use math to solve problems and communicate • Solve problems and make decisions • Plan <p>Interpersonal Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperate with others • Advocate and influence • Resolve conflict and negotiate • Guide others <p>Lifelong Learning Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for learning • Reflect and evaluate • Learn through research • Use information and communications technology <p><i>The nature, complexity, and context of the activity will determine which of these skills adults need to use.</i></p> |
| <p>ROLES</p> | | |
| <p>Family</p> <p>Example: Become active in the parent-teacher organization at your child’s school.</p>  | <p>Citizen</p> <p>Example: Organize a letter-writing campaign to your state representatives and senators regarding up-coming legislation.</p>  | <p>Worker</p> <p>Example: Warn co-workers of a safety hazard and alert the safety officer that work conditions have become unsafe.</p>  |
| <p><small>Equipped for the Future</small> <small>NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY Revised – 8/1/99</small></p> | | |

Please visit <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/common-activities/ComAct10.pdf> for more information.

Sharon wants to use the common activity Exercise Rights and Responsibilities by casting her vote. There is a new proposition on the ballot that would change the way California does business. She wants to learn about the proposition. She is keeping updated on local laws and regulations as she conducts research on how this new law would change things in California. When

she understands it, she will vote and she will also tell her legislators how she feels so that they can represent her wishes. What other ways can Sharon exercise her rights and responsibilities?

IV. Using the EFF Standards for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning for civic education

Equipped for the Future uses Purposes, Roles, and Common Activities to facilitate literacy goals such as voting. A fourth tool that is used is skills. To be an informed voter requires several skills:

- Observe Critically
- Read With Understanding
- Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- Learn Through Research
- Reflect and Evaluate

Let's look more closely at some of these skills as they relate to voting. Each skill is named and then is followed by a series of bulleted statements. Being skillful involves doing each of the bulleted items. Your students will probably do them at varying levels. Look for progress in how well and how independently they do them.

For information about how Sharon can get a registration form, how to complete it and send it in, how to choose a party, see "Voting is as easy as 1-2-3" at <http://www.easyvoter.org/california/howtovote/1.html>.

Sharon is going to find out about who the candidates are and what they stand for. She can read the Easy Voter Guide, listen to the radio, watch TV, meet the candidates, and talk to friends to learn more about what is going on. While she is using these techniques, she will be observing critically. She will need to use each bulleted strategy below.

A. Observe Critically

- Attend to visual sources of information, including television and other media;
- determine the purpose for observation and use strategies appropriate to the purpose;
- monitor comprehension and adjust strategies;
- analyze the accuracy, bias, and usefulness of the information;
- integrate it with prior knowledge to address viewing purpose.

#1 The first strategy is to watch TV and use other forms of media. Pay attention to what is being talked about.

#2 Why is Sharon watching TV and using other media? Probably to learn about the election and to make a decision about how to vote.

#3 Does she understand what is being said? If not, what can she do to make sure she does understand it? One suggestion would be to tape the broadcast so she can listen to it at her own pace and take the messages apart. Does she agree or disagree? Does she understand, etc.?

#4 Who is speaking? Is it a candidate or a supporter? Is it a person who should be neutral, for example a reporter? Is the person reporting news or giving opinions? Is it an advertisement (paid) or a news story? The answers to these questions will help with the analysis.

#5 What does Sharon already know about voting, this candidate or issue, etc.? How does the new information fit in to what she already knows?

When Sharon has done each of the bulleted items above, she has observed critically. A follow-up question would be to ask her how comfortable she feels

Use scaffolding (what the students already know) to build on what they will learn. Discuss the ways emotion, language, bias, accuracy, etc. can influence the message. Example: look for all emotional words in a candidate's campaign piece. Compare to the Easy Voter Guide and the sample ballot.

observing critically. How will she know if she is doing it better next time? Note: Infomercials are a good test of the ability to observe critically.

B. Read With Understanding

Sharon wants to read the Easy Voter Guide to learn more about the voting process. She is using the skill Read With Understanding.

- Determine the reading purpose;
- select reading strategies appropriate to the purpose;
- monitor comprehension and adjust reading strategies;
- analyze the information and reflect on its underlying meaning;
- integrate it with prior knowledge to address reading purpose.

#1 Why does she want to read the Easy Voter Guide? What does she expect to get out of it?

#2 How will she read this text? Some examples are listed in the accompanying lesson plan. They include studying new words, predicting what will be in the text, reading and summarizing, then discussing questions.

#3 Determine if the strategies in #2 above are working. If not, how can you change them? Example, read silently, read together each section out loud, then read it again, then talk about it.

#4 Sharon read it and understood it, but now she has to think about it. Does she agree or disagree? Is it going to help her make a decision about how to vote?

#5 What does she already know about the topic? Sharon has to take the new information and combine it with the old information to form an opinion. Does she have enough information now or does she need to go somewhere else for more information?

C. Learn Through Research

Sharon wants to learn more so that she can vote with confidence. She is going to do research to cast an informed vote.

- Pose a question to be answered or make a prediction about objects or events;
- use multiple lines of inquiry to collect information;
- organize, evaluate, analyze, and interpret findings.

#1 Who is running for office? What do they stand for? What is the job description for the office?

#2 How can I find out about the candidates? Easy Voter Guide, newspaper articles, editorial section of newspaper, TV ads, TV news, interviews, Sample Ballot, etc. If Sharon uses all these sources she will have more information.

#3 Which are the best sources? Are the ads and campaign mailers more or less biased than the newspaper editorial? Make a T Chart to determine with columns headed “biased” and “unbiased” or “opinion” and “fact.” Write the name of the source in the best column to help make a decision.

| Example: | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| biased | unbiased |
| mailer | newspaper article |
| TV ad | TV news story |

D. Reflect and Evaluate

- Take stock of where one is: assess what one knows already and the relevance of that knowledge;
- make inferences, predictions, or judgments based on one’s reflections.

Sharon needs to find out who she is and what she believes in. She can do that by reflecting on her values.

#1 What is important to Sharon? Does she think that healthcare is important or taxes or building more roads, or crime, or education, or . . . ? If there were one thing that could be changed to make the world better, what would that be?

#2 Which candidates are more or less likely to support that change? What are some of the less important factors? Which candidate comes closest to meeting Sharon's needs?

E. Solve Problems and Make Decisions

It's crunch time now. Sharon has to make a decision on how to vote.

- Anticipate or identify problems;
- use information from diverse sources to arrive at a clearer understanding of the problem and its root causes;
- generate alternative solutions;
- evaluate strengths and weaknesses of alternatives, including potential risks and benefits and short- and long-term consequences;
- select alternative that is most appropriate to goal, context, and available resources;
- establish criteria for evaluating effectiveness of solution or decision.

#1 Is there 1 candidate who sees the world exactly the way Sharon does? If not, how will she feel if she supports someone who doesn't agree on everything that Sharon feels is important?

#2 Sharon has gathered lots of different information, which she has read, listened to, or talked about. Why is her issue important? What is the cause of the problem?

#3 How can this problem be fixed? Think of more than one way. Example: If crime is Sharon's most important issue, it could be related to education, after school programs, job training, lack of available jobs, appropriate jobs, putting people in prison, etc. Finding answers to these problems could reduce crime.

#4 If Sharon has come up with some answers, she then has to determine if they are possible. Why are they good or bad solutions? What could make them better?

#5 Maybe Sharon's community group can create an after school program that will keep kids busy with adult supervision and therefore reduce crime. Maybe she can also vote for someone who plans to do something about the crime rate in her area.

#6 What makes a solution good or bad? Is it money? Time? Support? Something else? Sharon has to weigh the decision before deciding what to do next.

Sharon and her tutor can use all of the EFF tools listed above or choose a few. Together they can form the basis of a comprehensive unit on civic participation. For more information about the Equipped for the Future Project, please see <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff.html>. For more information about voting and other forms of civic involvement, please visit www.easyvoter.org.

Credits: This tutor resource was written for the Easy Voter Guide Project by Ellen Loebel of Vision Literacy of the Santa Clara County Library. Special thanks go to Chris McFadden of READ/San Diego and Caroline Beverstock of Project Read - San Mateo. Design by Literacyworks. Development of this EFF tutor guide has been funded by the California State Library with a grant under the federal Library Services and Technology Act.