MYSCHOOL ELECTION.nz

Accurate Data for Better Electoral Rolls: Guide for Returning Officers

UPDATED MARCH 2023

Well-run elections begin with high-quality, well-formatted data for your Electoral Roll.

To get your data up to scratch and ready for an election, the Returning Officer must first clean it. That is, pre-process it to remove later headaches, improve participation rates and head off complaints from your community.

Here, we'll go through what data cleaning is, what your SMS can and cannot do for you, and show you the different techniques you can use to get a clean electoral roll ready for uploading for online voting.

Feel free to jump straight to the section that interests you the most:

1. Data cleaning for Electoral Rolls
2. What your data should look like when it is clean.

Data Cleaning for Electoral Rolls

Data cleaning, data cleansing, or data scrubbing is the act of first identifying any issues or bad data, then systematically correcting these issues.

Every database has errors. Even a 'clean' database of 100 entries will still have 3%- 10% of errors.

Fixing bad data is tedious. But you have a more inclusive election, fewer complaints, and greater participation, if your data is cleaned.

Plus your data will be more useful for all other communications you will want to send to parents.

Common issues are:

	EXAMPLE
Two parents in one cell	Mr and Mrs Elder Mrs G Smith & Mr Smith
Inconsistent data entry that makes it hard to sort and/or find duplicates	Mrs J Elder Jean Elder Jean Marie Elder J Elder

Out of date postal addresses	
Missing post codes	
More than one email address in a single cell	jelder@extracareful.co.nz; jeane@home.com
More than one mobile number in a single cell	021234567; 095767777 M:021234567; H: 095767777; W:098765432
Incorrectly formatted email addresses **(spot the mistakes in all of these)**	jelder@gmail jelder@gmail..com jelder@gmail.com. jelder@mail.com jelder@gmial.com j elder@gmail.com jelder@ gmail.com jelder @myschool.nz
Incorrectly formatted mobile phone number	6789042 (must start with 02 or 2) 021 171-6336
Notes about parents in the cell (some highly confidential!)	–call Fridays only -don't use this number
Two, or four, sets of data that must be combined	Caregiver 1 and 2 in separate cells, but postal, mobile and phone contact details combined. OR Caregiver 1 and 2 together in a single cell, but postal, mobile and phone contact details spread across multiple columns
For intermediate schools, multiple data sets that must be combined and duplicates removed.	Inconsistencies across different data sets are to be expected.

Figure 1: Common database issues for Returning Officers

At the least working with bad data is a massive waste of time and money. The consequence of errors for online voting may include:

- You pay NZ Post for undeliverable letters that get returned to you.
- Voters complain about not getting voting papers (if postal voting) or not getting notifications (if online voting).
- Voters get automatically deleted from the Electoral Roll because of technical email or mobile phone errors.

Data-cleaning is tedious. But if you don't set aside the time at the outset, you'll probably spend more time fixing problems further down the line. Data cleaning is a non-negotiable step in your data pre-processing.

So now let's examine how your data should look before upload to the My School Election dashboard.

✓ Your ideal electoral roll

A completed spreadsheet should look like this: 8 columns, in this order.

Name (First name, last name)	Email	Postal Address1	Postal Address 2	Town/City	Post code	Mobile phone	Postal vote request
Mary Le Bon	mary@gmail.com	14B Every Street	Silverside	Auckland	1234	027434569	
Hoani Waititi		19 Filbry Place	Westside	Auckland	1234	021617777	Y

Why in this order?

- It makes sense to have names first! You want to make your spreadsheet searchable by Name.
- Many electronic communications depend on the email as the point of reference, so it should come next.
- By placing the address in four columns, your address will be ready for addressing envelopes.
- The phone number should be a mobile one for txt messaging / SMS use.
- The final column helps you identify which voters require postal voting.

Data Cleaning Techniques That You Can Put Into Practice Right Away

1. **Remove irrelevant columns**. No student names should be present.
2. (Your SMS may give you parents across more than 8 columns). **Put data into single columns.**
3. **Put first and last names together** (in an empty column use the CONCAT function. [=CONCAT (A2," ",B2)]
4. **Check consistency**. For example, Mary James, not Mary JAMES (unless every last name is capitalised). Auckland, not AKL.

5. **Remove honorifics**. You can't sort according to surname if your cell says: Miss Mary Le Bon; nor will you find duplicates if Mary also appears later as Mary Le Bon.

6. **Remove duplicates** from the names column. (Data > Remove Duplicates)

7. **Sort according to email addresses**. Now you know who must get a postal vote. Put Y in the final column.

8. **Remove phone numbers that are not mobiles**.

9. **Sort according to mobile phone data**. Now you know who must get a postal vote. Put Y in the final column for those without a mobile number.

10. **Remove** one of two phone numbers in the same cell.

11. Little **green triangles** in the corner mean you have a formula error. For example, numbers have been inputted as text. Change to numerals to remove these.

12. **Remove** one of two emails in the same cell.

13. Duplicate emails are allowed.

14. **Identify mobile duplicates before you upload** – mobile duplicates are NOT allowed as they are the authentication tool for online voting. That is, one voter, one mobile phone, one vote. (Use Conditional Formatting on the Home ribbon to highlight duplicate values. Often a duplicate mobile will show you a duplicate name not caught at step 5. Remove one.)

15. **Missing values.** It goes without saying that you will need a campaign to gather in missing data if you are to ensure that everyone entitled to vote gets one.

16. If you are the Returning Officer for an Intermediate School, you will be putting several different databases together. Remove all formatting to stop funny things happening in your spreadsheet (it's not hard)

Once you have checked for the above,

17. **Use Flashfill** - for example, the city column (Auckland) all the way down if you like.

Data Cleaning Techniques for your Staff Roll

1. **Only use school emails.** School emails are owned by the school and therefore are not private addresses. You will only rarely need to use a postal address for a staff vote.
2. **Check permission** to use mobile phone for electronic voting for the staff election. Mobile phones are (mostly) personal devices. Does the school have a policy for this?
3. **Use Flashfill** - for example, the city column (Auckland) all the way down if you like.

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