How Votes Add Up

Follow the path from voters to electoral votes.

USG.C.5.5 "Explain the function of the Electoral College, identifying different methods in which presidential electors are determined (e.g., split electoral vote versus winner-take-all)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that tells what electors do, circle the names of the two methods for awarding electoral votes, and number the two rules used in the district method.

Who Gets a State's Electoral Votes?

1. On election night, a news anchor may say a candidate has "won a state," but the state does not hand over the presidency. Voters in each state and the District of Columbia choose electors who later cast the official votes for president and vice president. Together, these electors form the Electoral College. Each state gets as many electors as it has members in Congress: its House seats plus two senators. The District of Columbia gets three. There are 538 electoral votes in all, and a candidate needs a majority, at least 270, to win the presidency.

2. In 48 states and the District of Columbia, a statewide popular vote determines which candidate receives all of that place's electoral votes. This is called winner-take-all. A candidate who wins a state by a few hundred votes gets the same number of that state's electoral votes as a candidate who wins by a million. State law sets the method for choosing electors, within federal constitutional limits. Because the rules operate state by state, a candidate can win the national popular vote but lose the Electoral College. Winning states with enough electoral votes, rather than simply receiving the most votes nationwide, decides the result.

3. Maine and Nebraska use a different method, often called the congressional district method. The candidate with the most votes statewide receives two electoral votes, reflecting the state's two Senate seats. The winner in each congressional district receives one electoral vote for that district. If different candidates win different districts, the state's votes can be split. For example, imagine a state with three districts where one candidate wins statewide and two districts, while another candidate wins the remaining district. The first candidate receives four electoral votes, and the second receives one. Electors then meet in their states to cast votes, which Congress counts.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do voters' choices become a presidential win through the Electoral College? Include the number of electoral votes needed.

2. In a winner-take-all state, what happens if a candidate wins the statewide popular vote by only a few hundred votes?

3. How do Maine and Nebraska award their two statewide electoral votes and their district electoral votes? When can their votes be split?

4. Why might the candidate with the most votes nationwide fail to win the presidency?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A made-up state has six electoral votes and four congressional districts. Candidate A wins statewide and districts 1 and 2; Candidate B wins districts 3 and 4. Write four sentences that give each candidate's total under winner-take-all and the district method, explain what electors do, and state one difference between the methods.

ANSWER KEY

How Votes Add Up

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.5.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that tells what electors do, circle the names of the two methods for awarding electoral votes, and number the two rules used in the district method. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do voters' choices become a presidential win through the Electoral College? Include the number of electoral votes needed.	**Voters choose electors, who cast the official votes for president and vice president. A candidate needs at least 270 of the 538 electoral votes to win.**
2	In a winner-take-all state, what happens if a candidate wins the statewide popular vote by only a few hundred votes?	**That candidate receives all of the state's electoral votes, even with a narrow statewide win.**
3	How do Maine and Nebraska award their two statewide electoral votes and their district electoral votes? When can their votes be split?	**The statewide winner gets two votes, and the winner of each congressional district gets one vote. The votes can be split when different candidates win different districts.**
4	Why might the candidate with the most votes nationwide fail to win the presidency?	**Electoral votes are awarded state by state, not by the national popular vote. Another candidate can win enough electoral votes to reach 270.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Under winner-take-all, Candidate A receives all six electoral votes and Candidate B receives none. Under the district method, Candidate A receives two statewide votes and two district votes, while Candidate B receives two district votes, making the totals four to two. The electors cast the official votes for president and vice president. Winner-take-all gives the statewide winner every vote, while the district method can give a candidate who loses statewide some electoral votes.

Accept equivalent explanations that distinguish statewide votes from district votes. For Your Turn, the correct totals are A 6, B 0 under winner-take-all and A 4, B 2 under the district method.