



University of Vermont
Center for Community News

Assignment Template: Covering local voters ahead of a midterm election

The Center for Community News' mission is to grow and support partnerships between college reporting programs and local news outlets. CCN has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students to contribute local news to their community. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes. For questions about this template, contact CCN Program Coordinator Sarah Gamard at sarah.gamard@uvm.edu.

Notes for Faculty

WHAT: The big question during the midterms is how voters feel about the presidency two years into the four-year term, and their way of making that known is who they plan to vote for on the ballot. This is typically determined by who they vote for in Congress, and if existing congresspeople have challengers. One way to approach this is see how voters swayed during 2024 for their president and congressional seats.

WHY: What newsrooms always want – and almost never get – is an accurate picture of its readers' leanings approaching any election. What percent voted for or against the incumbents, and how do they feel now? Have they changed their minds? Specifically, what do they think about Trump?

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE: This assignment can be a photo essay, a series of vertical video clips or a plain series of written stories, depending on how you want to format it.

It can be used for beginners or more experienced students:

1. For beginners: In this case, this assignment is a great opportunity to do man-on-the-street interviews with voters in local communities – especially those who may have gone for the current president.
2. For advanced students: Man-on-the-street interviews with some additional analysis, including speaking to political experts or the candidates themselves.

About CCN

The [Center for Community News](#) at UVM is a nonpartisan organization that is working to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs around the country, to create a more sustainable future for local news outlets and the communities they serve.

Assignment: Covering local voters ahead of a midterm election

Instructions

Step 1: Study up on who is running. Midterm elections include every congressperson, who is elected or re-elected every two years. Sometimes, it includes U.S. senators, state lawmakers or local council members. Read some local news stories on these races.

Step 2: Interview three people. Ask them the questions below, making sure you identify yourself properly. Make sure they know they are on the record and where the story could be published. Get their names, residence, age and occupation.

Step 3: Condense the interviews. Take the key points they said and summarize them into a story. You can use a couple of their direct quotes.

People you can interview:

- Strangers in public

People you *can't* interview:

- Fellow students
- Family members
- Friends or acquaintances

Questions you can ask:

- Who did you vote for in 2024: Trump or Biden, and why?
- How are you feeling about Trump's performance so far this term?
- How do you plan to vote in the midterms, and why?
- What race are you most invested in, and why? (For some, it's Congress or the Senate, but for others, it might be a local race.)

Note: Do not use these interviews as a way to debate with the interviewees on their views. Be kind and listen.

Definitions

- **Midterm election:** A type of election where the people can elect their representatives and other officeholders, from Congress to local councils, in the middle of the 4-year term of the president.

Note to faculty: You can also use this to identify some key races in your area.

Word Count / Video Length:

Deadline:

Step 1: Study up on who is running. Midterm elections include every congressperson, who is elected or re-elected every two years. Sometimes, it includes U.S. senators, state lawmakers or local council members. Read some local news stories on these races.

Step 2: Divvy up reporting tasks. Each reporter needs to do their own slice of reporting to make this story whole. This story will need someone to interview regular voters, someone else to interview each candidate, someone will need to interview a nonpartisan political expert (these are usually found at a local college) and someone else to do analysis based on previous voter turnout and any changes to the population or community that could decide which candidate will win (we will not be predicting the winner, but pointing out factors that have traditionally impacted elections). Decide who will do what before proceeding to Step 3.

Step 3: Interview people. Ask them the questions below, making sure you identify yourself properly. Make sure they know they are on the record and where the story could be published. Get their names, residence, age and occupation.

Step 4: Condense the interviews and add them to a collaborative document to share with your fellow reporters. Take the key points they said and summarize them into a section of the greater story.

People you can interview:

- Strangers in public spaces who live in the state or community you are reporting for
- The candidates
- A political expert

Note to faculty: If students are new, explain that their First Amendment rights allow them to document or interview people in public spaces, such as on the street, but if they try to approach and interview strangers in a private establishment, such as a restaurant or grocery store, they could be kicked out.

People you *can't* interview:

- Fellow students
- Family members
- Friends or acquaintances

Questions you can ask voters:

- May I interview you for a story for XXX, and may I record it?
- What is your name, and the full spelling?
- How old are you, what do you do for a living and what area do you live?
- Who did you vote for in 2024: Trump or Biden, and why?
- How are you feeling about Trump's performance so far this term?
- How do you plan to vote in the midterms, and why?

- What race are you most invested in, and why? (For some, it's Congress or the Senate, but for others, it might be a local race.)

Questions you can ask the candidates:

- What do you think is the biggest issue for this community?
- [If this is true, you can ask:] You are running on the Republican/Democratic ticket, but voters in this community voted for the other party last election. Why do you think they'll vote for you?
- [If you already have a quote from a voter that they should respond to, go ahead and let them.]

Questions you can ask the political analyst:

- What factors will determine this election, and how do you expect voters in our community to vote?

Note: Do not use these interviews as a way to debate with the interviewees on their views; a journalist's job is to report what they see and hear, no matter if they agree with it or not. Be kind and listen!

Definitions

- **Ballot measure:** a law, issue or topic placed on a statewide or municipal ballot for voters to decide through an election

Note to faculty: You can also use this to summarize each ballot measure.

Word Count / Video Length:

Deadline: