



Q&A on Tabulator Tapes

1. What is a “zero tape”?

The zero tape is a slip of paper printed by a tabulator which shows that the tabulator has no ballots or votes stored in its memory. North Carolina election officials print a zero tape before the beginning of voting on Election Day to ensure that only those ballots that are completed by voters during voting hours are counted by the tabulator at the precinct.

2. Can the public see the zero tape prior to the opening of the polls?

Yes. To permit members of the public to view the zero count, the chief judge may, after the zero tape has been printed, remove the zero tape and display it from a secure distance. The chief judge may also permit the public to view the zero count on the tabulator from a secure distance.

3. Can the public get a copy of the zero tape?

After the election, yes. During the election the zero tape must remain in the custody of poll workers and secured throughout the voting process. 08 NCAC 04 .0304(a). Once the election day materials have been returned to the county board office and results have been tallied, the county board can fulfill a request for a copy of the zero tape “as promptly as possible.” N.C.G.S. § 132-6(a).

4. Can the public videotape or record the opening or closing procedures?

No. Cameras are not permitted in the voting enclosure, whether before, during, or after voting. North Carolina law permits the public to “view,” “observe,” or “witness” these procedures—not to record them. N.C.G.S. § 163-182.2(a)(3); 08 NCAC 04 .0304(a); 08 NCAC 10B .0105(h). However, after the polls close and the poll workers have posted the results tapes, anyone may photograph the posted results tapes.

5. What is a “results tape”?

The results tape is a slip of paper that a tabulator prints at the end of voting which shows the number of votes cast for each ballot item in the precinct.

6. Can the public view the results tape?

Yes. After the polls close on Election Day, bipartisan elections officials count the votes at each precinct. This includes printing the results tapes from the tabulator. Once the officials sign off on the results, the results are posted for the public to view.

7. Can the public participate in the opening or closing procedures?

No. North Carolina law prohibits anyone except elections officials from participating in these processes. The public may observe these procedures. It is against the law to interfere with or impede election officials carrying out these procedures. N.C.G.S. § 163-182.2(a)(3); 08 NCAC 04 .0304(a). Election officials may remove anyone creating a disturbance, including with the assistance of law enforcement. N.C.G.S. § 163-48.