

# Policy Style Guide

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy style guide is to provide uniform standards for policy drafting for University and Unit policies. Refer to this guide when drafting a new policy or revising an existing policy.

## PERIODIC POLICY REVIEW

As noted in the University Policy-Making Policy, the Policy Sponsor and Responsible Unit will systemically review policies every 3 years to determine whether (a) the policy is still needed or should be repealed; (b) revisions are needed; and (c) there are gaps that indicate where a new Policy or new policy language should be developed.

## BEFORE YOU START

### Is a policy the right tool?

A policy describes a rule that must be followed but does not prescribe **how** the rule should be implemented or followed.

If your goal is to specify how to comply, such as process steps, then the information should be in a documented procedure, process, or protocol rather than a policy.

If your goal is to document historical or background information, an internal memo, white paper, or webpage may be a better fit.

If your goal is to recommend best practices, a guidance document may be the best solution.

Unit and Academic policies, processes, protocols, guidance documents, internal memos, white papers, and website language are not required to adhere to the University Policy-Making Policy, including the 30-day minimum stakeholder review period.

If your goal is to introduce a uniform rule or practice that has a wide application for a variety of University community members, then a policy may be the right choice. Review your draft policy against other University policies, ABOR policies, regulations, bylaws, and any other rules that may govern the topic you are addressing. If your policy is not compatible with other requirements, it may not be approved.

## STANDARD POLICY TEMPLATE: WHAT TO INCLUDE

### Template

The [Policy Template](#) must be used to create the policy. The template is structured using Divide by sections to keep each major policy component separate. This format will:

- help keep the policy organized,
- make it easy for the reader to find the needed information, and
- make it easier for stakeholders to understand and comply with the policy.

### Policy Information

This section designates who the Policy Sponsor and Responsible Unit are and provides a consistent University email address (e.g., [policy@arizona.edu](mailto:policy@arizona.edu) instead of [celinar@arizona.edu](mailto:celinar@arizona.edu)) for communicating any questions or concerns about the policy.

### Purpose and Summary

This section briefly explains why this policy exists and provides a summary of what the policy is intended to accomplish. For example:

“This Policy is intended to protect the integrity and reputation of the University of Arizona (University) by ensuring conflicts of interest and commitment are appropriately eliminated or managed and by promoting objectivity in research.”

### Scope

This section designates who the policy applies to. For example: Does the policy only apply to employees, or are students or community members included? Does the policy apply only on-campus? These types of questions should be clearly answered within the scope section.

### Definitions

This section is where definitions are added for any jargon, terms of art, acronyms, or other novel language that is used in the policy. These types of terms should be avoided unless they are crucial to clearly stating the policy.

Terms used within the policy should be defined in this section. After you are finished drafting the policy, verify that any terms in the definitions section are still used throughout the policy. If any defined terms were edited out, remove the defined terms from the definitions section.

List defined terms in alphabetical order (A to Z). Do not number each individual definition.

Finally, do not define terms to mean something other than their commonly understood meaning.

For example:

“**Student** means an individual over 18 years of age who is taking 15 or more credits in the current semester.”

This is a poorly written definition, because it re-defines the term “Student” with more criteria than fits the common definition.

Redefining common terms often causes confusion, and users will tend to interpret the policy using the common meaning.

## Policy

This section is where the actual content of the policy is written. Be sure to include:

- Who the policy applies to – even if already written in the Scope section
- Specific responsibilities, connected with organizational roles or job titles
  - Note: use job titles rather than the individual’s name
  - If a unit or department is responsible, rather than a specific individual, provide links to the unit’s or department’s procedures, guidelines, forms, contacts, etc.
- State any conditions or restrictions after the general rule, with clear explanations of when those conditions apply
- Use “must” “must not” or “will” or “will not” terms in this section

Number each policy requirement in chronological order

## Compliance and Responsibilities

This section is where who is responsible for which action(s) is clearly defined in the policy, even if already stated in the policy section. Every responsibility listed in the policy must be assigned to an appropriate person or group.

Be sure to specify how compliance is assessed and by whom. Successful policies include realistic measures to enforce the policy’s requirements, such as regular audits.

## Frequently Asked Questions

This section is an excellent place to add specificity to the policy. Consider defining how the policy applies in unusual circumstances or challenges the policy may face, and address them here.

Think of the types of questions that a new employee or student may have about the policy. Find someone who is outside the department or who is not a subject matter expert and ask them to review the policy and if they have any questions or require clarification.

## Sources

This section is where sources are listed. Sources provide first-hand, original information. Sources may include, but are not limited to, laws, rules, and regulations that require the University to implement a policy.

When citing Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.), the [statute is cited as](#): A.R.S. followed by the number of the title and the number of the section in the title, separated by a dash.

For example: "A.R.S. section 1-101".

## Related Information

This section is where links, references, or other external sources of information that are relevant to the policy are listed. This could include other policies or any other information outside of your policy including processes, procedures, forms, guidelines, or websites that are relevant to understanding and implementing the policy.

## Revision History

This section is where revisions to the policy are documented.

If this is a new policy, write the current date using mm/dd/yyyy format and state "New Policy."

If the revision is an update to an existing policy, write the current date using mm/dd/yyyy format and provide a high-level summary of the changes that were made to the policy.

The order of the revision history should be listed by date descending (oldest dates will be at the bottom of the revision history list).

For example:

04/23/2021: Updated link to ABOR Policy 5-301.

02/26/2020: New Policy.

## POLICY GLOSSARY

**Designated Campus Colleagues (DCCs)** means affiliates, associates, volunteers, and interns who are granted DCC status by the University, who contribute their time, services, and expertise to help the University accomplish its mission of teaching, research, and service.

**Policy** means a statement that mandates or constrains actions and may affect the rights or duties of the University Community or general public. Policies are often intended to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and/or Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) Policies, reduce institutional risk, or promote operational efficiencies. Policies are also enacted to promote and safeguard the University mission and core values.

**Policy Sponsor** means the administrator or compliance professional who oversees the Unit that is responsible for the Policy.

**Responsible Unit** means the Unit that initiates a request for a new, or to revise or repeal a University Policy, consults with stakeholders, interprets and administers University Policies under its authority, oversees compliance of the University Policy, and regularly reviews and makes recommendations for updating, revising, or repealing its University Policies.

**Unit** means any University college, department, program, or other operating unit.

**Unit Policy** means a Policy that applies only within a particular Unit or only to the operations or transactions within a particular Unit and that are overseen by a particular Unit.

**University Community** means any of the following individuals: (a) University student; (b) University Employee; or (c) third party, including, but not limited to, contractors, vendors, volunteers, and Designated Campus Colleagues.

**University Employee** means faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate student workers, whether employment is full-time, part-time, permanent, or temporary.

**University Policy** means a Policy with broad application across the University that is approved by the President.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND MINIMIZING VISUALS

Some types of visual content, such as visual aids or graphics, need additional information to be accessible for everyone. To ensure this content is accessible for screen reader users or those with cognitive disabilities, be sure to provide sufficiently descriptive alternate text so the full content of the message is accessible to all readers. Please consult [IT Accessibility general guidelines](#) prior to creating accessible content.

## HYPERLINKS AND POLICY RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Use contextual links within the body of the policy and list them a second time under the Sources or Related Information sections.
- Rather than typing out a URL, instead embed the URL in the existing sentence by adding a hyperlink to the source.

For example:

<p><b>x Don't say:</b> "More information can be found at: <a href="https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/15/01633.htm">https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/15/01633.htm</a>."</p>	<p><b>√ Say:</b> "Refer to <a href="#">A.R.S. section 15-1633</a> for more information."</p>
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- Notify [policy@arizona.edu](mailto:policy@arizona.edu) any time a URL listed in the policy or standard changes in order to avoid broken links.
- Related documents should only be version dated in either the header or footer of the document to ensure the most current version is being used.
- Do not rename or add a version date to the document name, or save the document in a different file or other location, as this will change the URL of the file when it is posted online and the link to the document in the body of the policy will be broken.

## GENERAL WRITING GUIDANCE

### Use simple and factual language

Write your draft policy using the simplest, briefest language that will allow the reader to understand the policy. With policy, less is often more. The more verbose your policy is, the less likely it is people will read it carefully and ultimately follow it. Concise language leads to better compliance.

Use short sentences when possible. Avoid using multiple clauses within a single sentence since they reduce readability.

As a general rule when drafting a policy, aim to use language that will be understood to individuals around a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. The reading level of your audience is constantly fluctuating and two people of the same age and same educational background may still read at different levels.

Not only does this allow you to reach audience members who may not be the strongest at reading comprehension, it gets your message across quickly. Even audience members who read at higher levels will tend to appreciate copy that is written at a 6th grade level.

Use simple, direct language:

<b>x Don't say:</b> "In order to effectuate one's transaction effectively, one should consider providing the appropriate purchase order number."	<b>√ Say:</b> "Provide your purchase order number."
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Avoid using subjective language:

<b>x Don't say:</b> "Provide enough copies."	<b>√ Say:</b> "Provide three copies."
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Unless necessary for clarity, avoid using technical language, industry jargon, or words or phrases that have a precise, specialized meaning within a particular field or profession. If a specific term is necessary for clarity, then be sure to include a definition of the term in the definitions section of the policy.

Defined terms should be used consistently. The first letter of each word in a defined term is capitalized (uppercase) so that the reader can identify that the meaning of the term is specified in the policy and that they should interpret what they are reading in accordance with the definition given.

Please review the common defined terms used in University policies listed in the Policy Glossary section above and adopt these standard terms and their definitions.

The guidelines from the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) are an excellent resource for writing reader-friendly policy.

Good examples of plain language guidelines include:

- Use gender neutral language: "You", "their", "they" or "the individual;" avoid using gender specific pronouns (e.g., "he", "his" or "she" "her")
- Try to keep bullets and numbered lists to three or fewer levels
- Provide clear headings that define the content underneath
- Use topic sentences. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph because it gives an overview of the sentences to follow. The supporting sentences after the topic sentence help to develop the main idea. These sentences give specific details related to the topic sentence.

## Use active voice

Using an active voice in your writing will make responsibilities much clearer. Consider the following statements:

“A review was conducted of the matter with no decision made by the committee” and “The committee reviewed the matter and made no decision.”

The latter, in the active voice, more clearly identifies who performs which actions.

## Use precise words

The more precise the language, the easier it will be for stakeholders to follow the policy. For example:

- Use “will (not)” or “must (not)” instead of “shall (not)” to specify obligations and prohibitions
- Use “may” for discretionary actions
- Use “should” or “strongly encouraged” for recommended actions; however, consider whether recommended actions belong in the policy or are better suited in another communication, such as a procedure or guideline

## Avoid adverbs

Avoid overusing adverbs. Using strong verbs will reduce the number of words you use and will make the meaning concise.

<b>x Don't say:</b>	<b>√ Say:</b>
Labs must be completely inspected once per year.	Labs must be inspected once per year

## Omit excess words

When drafting policy, many writers use overly formal language or “legalese” which makes the policy more difficult to understand. For example:

<b>x Don't say:</b>	<b>√ Say:</b>
be responsible for	must
in accordance with	under
is able to	can
in the event that	if
in order to	to
as a result of	because
as well as	and, also



## Minimize abbreviations

If abbreviations are not commonly understood among all stakeholders, then avoid their use when possible. Examples of acceptable abbreviations, when used consistent with their typical meaning, include PhD, FBI, ATM, and other common terms.

If a term will be used many times in the policy, then it may be appropriate to expand the abbreviation on its first use, and use the abbreviation for the remainder of the policy. For example: "Our standard Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) are included in all contracts. These T&Cs are not negotiable."

To review some commonly used acronyms at the University, refer to the list of [Common Acronyms at the University of Arizona](#).

## Follow the University style guide

Refer to the [University Style Guide](#) for guidance on specific conventions, such as the appropriate way to refer to colleges, departments, or other university-specific terms.

## Check spelling and grammar

Double-check common issues such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. If possible, have a colleague who is not a subject matter expert in the relevant policy area review your policy before submitting it.

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If you have any questions regarding this policy style guide or would like assistance with any aspect of your policy development, please email [policy@arizona.edu](mailto:policy@arizona.edu).