

Policy Writing Guide

Getting Started

Do we need a policy?

A university policy states a governing principle which gives direction to decision-making or prescribes action in a particular academic or administrative area, or sets out principles to comply with legal obligations or institutional standards or to reduce risk. It should have broad applicability at the university and advance UFV's mission.

A specific rule for students or employees to follow or be aware of may simply need a regulation, alert or procedure stated in the calendar or on the website, rather than a formal university policy.

Departmental regulations, rules, guidelines or procedures should not be referred to as "policies" to avoid confusion with the formal university policies.

If yes, the next steps are:

a) Determine what the policy will do

The purpose statement clarifies the reason for a policy. Consider what values the policy is based on and what problems you are trying to solve. Policies should be consistent with the mission, goals and values of the institution.

b) Determine the scope

The scope defines any limits on the applicability of the policy. If it does not apply universally to all types of students or employees or all situations at UFV, indicate who or what it pertains to.

c) Determine the key elements to include

- Consult with key players.
- Research similar policies at other institutions and the main elements covered. Note related policies at UFV; what precedents do we have?
- Include definitions when words are used in a particular way in this policy or when terms are not commonly understood. Definitions are not necessary when a word is used in the usual way.
- The policy should establish "what" and "who" but not usually "how"; procedures are developed at the unit level, in compliance with university policy.

d) Use the policy resources and tools

From the Secretariat policy resources and tools webpage at <http://www.ufv.ca/secretariat/policy-resources-and-tools/>:

- Find the policy approval flow charts for administrative and senate policies.
- Download the standard policy template; read the guidelines for each section and the formatting information at the end.
- When ready to submit, complete the Policy Request form.
- A procedures template is provided for related procedures or guidelines.

Drafting the policy

Choose a title

Begin with a commonly used key-word, identify the purpose of the policy in as few words as possible.

Language and style tips

- Use simple, plain, grammatical English.
- Keep sentences short, 15-20 words at most; use adjectives and adverbs sparingly.
- Include one main idea per paragraph; keep paragraphs short.
- Use the same terminology throughout the document to avoid ambiguity.
- Use the third person (“they” not “you”) and present tense.
- Write in the active voice– say “X will do it” rather than “it will be done”.
- Use “shall” for mandatory actions, rather than “may” or “should”, which imply they are recommendations.
- Refer to the UFV style guide for correct punctuation and capitalization
<https://www.ufv.ca/university-relations/marcom/writing-style-guide/>

Checklist for good policy

Criteria for good policy

- Does it contain one or more clear principles?
- Will it be useful for the intended users, e.g. service users, staff and management/committee members?
- Is it clear and understandable?
- Is it congruent with the UFV mission, values, and goals?
- Are related policies and/or legislation listed (but only those that would provide edification to readers of this policy)?
- Are readers directed to appropriate procedures and who is responsible for implementing the procedures?
- Does it cover all areas relevant for accreditation and legislative requirements?
- Is it easy to find and access the policy online?

Questions?

Contact Policyconsult@ufv.ca