



Policy Style Guide

This Policy style guide has been developed by Assurance Services to assist policy document authors with drafting.

An easy to understand policy document can help to achieve a higher level of compliance and implementation.

FORMAT

The format of a policy document is pre-defined by the software that houses the University Policy Library. The software provides a workspace for drafting, editing and reviewing policy documents. It is preferred that the drafting and revising of policy documents occurs in the Policy Library workspace. Assurance Services can facilitate access to this workspace and provide training to users – contact x16487 or policy@newcastle.edu.au.

Where, for a valid reason, it is not possible to draft a policy document in the workspace, the [policy template](#) can be used. However, prior to submitting the document for approval the content must be transferred into the Policy Library workspace, and the draft from the workspace used to seek approval. This will ensure the clause numbering, Policy Library glossary definitions and details of the policy are consistent, correct and are considered as part of the approval process.

STRUCTURE

The pre-configured format of policy documents allows for the following structure:

SECTION (numbered)

PART (letter)

Major Heading

Minor Heading

- 1. Clause
 - a. Sub Clause
 - i. sub-sub clause
 - Bullet point

Whilst it is advisable to always use section headings, it is not essential to use part headings.

It is not advisable to use bullet points, as this does not provide for referencing by readers, reviewers, approvers or authors. If in drafting the author is led to the use of bullet points, the structure of the clause should be reviewed to ensure that bullet points are absolutely necessary.

Major and minor headings can be used to improve ease of reading and will create a navigation pane in the Policy Library when viewing the document on-line.

LANGUAGE

Use Plain English

Plain English should be used at all times to ensure that any reader can understand and comply with the content, regardless of their level of knowledge of the subject.

Avoid jargon and use every day familiar words.

Avoid marketing terms, aspirational statements, trendy words, colloquialisms, euphemisms and slang.

Avoid legal terms and legalese such as abovementioned, aforementioned, foregoing, henceforth, hereafter, hereby, thereafter, thereof, therewith, whatsoever, wherein, whereof, etc.

Where specific content is critical to mitigate a risk or ensure compliance, be explicit about what is required to comply.

If a specific term must be used and the definition or context of the term may not be clear to all readers, discuss the definition with Assurance Services to determine if the definition should be added to the Policy Library glossary or included in the document draft.

Use an Active Voice

Active voice describes how an action is to be performed, and by whom. It eliminates any ambiguity regarding responsibility.

Passive voice only describes the action.

Examples:

Active Voice Statement (Preferred)	Passive Voice Statement (Not Preferred)
The Vice Chancellor may approve an exception to this requirement.	Exceptions to this requirement may be approved.
The student must include the following information in their appeal:	The following information must be included in the appeal for it to be considered:
The Project Manager must develop a project plan.	The project is to be planned by the Project Manager.

Gender Neutral Language

Using gender neutral language or gender inclusive language avoids discrimination against a particular gender.

Examples:

Gender Neutral / Inclusive	Not Gender Neutral / Inclusive
The Chairperson is responsible for scheduling each meeting.	The Chairman is responsible for scheduling each meeting.
The employee should submit the form to seek approval of their application.	The employee should submit the form to seek approval of her/his application.

Consider the Reader

When drafting, consider the audience that the content is directed towards.

What do they need to know? – keep it.

What is irrelevant to them? – discard it.

SENTENCES AND CLAUSES

Logical Order

The structure of the document, the sequence and order of clauses will determine readability of the document.

For policies, a logical order is to begin with wide reaching statements (introduction, audience, principles) and then to specific clauses (details).

For procedures, a logical order is beginning with the actions that should occur first, and ending with the actions that should occur last.

Simplicity

Short and simple sentences make it easy for the reader to understand what is required of them.

Avoid additional words that do not add value to the sentence.

Avoid unnecessary capitalisation.

Each clause should convey a specific message. Keep sentences within clauses to a minimum. Opt for sub-clauses, lists or tables when the key message cannot be conveyed in a short form.

Avoid, where possible, jumping from one clause to the next for content about the same message.

Avoid unnecessary information (such as background information) or redundant information. Wordy, dense documents become confusing and do not attract readers.

Use minor headings to split a key message into digestible parts.

Examples:

Simple Sentence (Preferred)	Complex Sentence (Not Preferred)
The course curricula includes international content and perspectives to develop understanding of global contexts.	The curricula of the course includes international content and perspectives, in order to develop students understanding of the global contexts of what they are learning.
The supervisor should provide guidance about: a. the nature of research; b. the expected standard of performance; c. the choice of research topic; d. the planning of the research program; e. the presentation of the research proposal; f. literature and sources; g. attendance at classes; and h. appropriate research methodologies and requisite techniques.	The supervisor should provide guidance about the nature of research and the standard of performance expected, about the choice of research topic, about the planning of the research program and presentation of a research proposal, about literature and sources, attendance at taught classes where appropriate and about appropriate research methodologies and requisite techniques.

Strong Clause Structure (Preferred)	Weak Clause Structure (Not Preferred)
1) The staff member must complete the Purchase Order, and include the following information: a. cost of the goods; b. GST component; c. supplier name and ABN.	1) The staff member must complete the Purchase Order. 2) The cost of the goods, GST component and supplier name and ABN should be included.

In the above example “Weak Clause Structure”, it may be unclear to some readers that the two clauses are related. The stronger example provides greater clarity for the reader to understand what is required of them when completing the Purchase Order.

Capitalisation

Avoid unnecessary capitalisation. Capitalise titles, such as:

- The McMullen Building;
- Vice Chancellor;
- University of Newcastle;
- Application for Higher Duties Form;

Do not capitalise after a semi colon or colon unless the first word is a title or name.

Capitalise days, months and holidays. (E.g. Monday, June, Christmas Day).

Must / Shall / Will / May

Use 'must' on all occasions when an action is mandatory.

Use 'must not' when an action is prohibited.

Use 'may' when an action is optional.

Use 'should' when an action is recommended.

'Shall' and 'will' may be considered passive voice, and should be avoided wherever necessary.

When determining if an action is mandatory, optional or recommended, consider the following:

- any legislative or rule requirement that may pre-determine if the action is mandatory;
- the ability to always comply with a mandatory action;
- the consequence of always having to comply with a mandatory action – it may be inappropriate for a universal rule to be applied where individual circumstances may vary;
- the consequence of not complying with an optional action.

If an action is mandatory, consider applying a timeframe for the action. *E.g. The student must submit their Acceptance Form to the Scholarships Office within 21 working days of being notified of the scholarship offer.*

If relevant, be explicit about the consequence of not complying with a mandatory action. If there is a consequence and it is not explicitly stated any decision to apply the consequence may be more easily appealed. Additionally, being explicit about a consequence may encourage compliance. However, take care to only be explicit about consequences that can be applied whilst remaining compliant with other University policy documents, or the law.

E.g. Staff who fail to comply with the requirements of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Enterprise Agreement, or their contract of employment; or

Students must attend all scheduled interviews regarding their professional placement. Students who fail to attend a scheduled interview may be awarded a fail mark for the related course.

Terminology

Consistency is the key. When using a title, regardless of what the title is, ensure that it is referred to in the same way throughout the document, unless the title is reduced in the first instance.

Example:

Consistent Terminology	Inconsistent Terminology
The University of Newcastle (University) will provide staff with access to the University of Newcastle Act (the Act) via the policy library. The University will advise staff and students should the Act be amended.	The University will provide staff with access to the Act via the policy library.
The Application for Leave Form should be completed and submitted to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) (DVCA). The DVCA will advise of approval of the Application for Leave Form within 7 working days.	The Leave Form should be completed and submitted to the DVC. The DVCA will advise approval of the Leave Application Form within 7 working days.

Avoid using personal names and contact details.

Repetition

Avoid repeating content that has already been stated previously in the document. Use references to clauses where necessary.

Avoid repeating content from other documents, including legislation. Use placeholders when necessary to link to other documents (see below).

PLACEHOLDERS VERSUS HYPERLINKS

The software that houses the University Policy Library maintains a database of all links from policy documents, including links to:

- legislation, including codes and standards;
- websites;
- other policy documents;
- forms and templates; and
- digital assets.

This information is referred to as “Associated Information”.

When drafting or revising any policy document, the list of available Associated Information should be used. If a link to any associated information is required, but it cannot be found in the available lists of information, the Policy Officer should be contacted who will add the information to the database.

Amendments to existing information, such as version changes, should also be notified to the Policy Officer so that the database can be updated.

Hyperlinks should not be used in the Policy Library workspace and may create unintended content when viewing the document.

TABLES AND IMAGES

Tables can be included in draft documents in the Policy Library workspace, and can be used to make complex information easier to understand.

Images cannot be inserted into draft documents in the Policy Library workspace. If an image is essential to a policy document, it is recommended it be linked as a piece of Associated Information (see placeholders versus hyperlinks above).