

Policy Cycle Tips Stage 2

Writing Policy Documents

An initial draft of a policy document is written by the designated Policy Writer. Amending an existing policy document is initiated by obtaining the most recent word-version from the [Policy Unit](#).

Content	
Brainstorm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write down detailed information, and then progressively sort this text into a logical order • develop a rough draft of key points (headings or themes) for possible inclusion in the document. Certain legislation, regulations or codes may specify issues that are required to be included in the policy document. These key points and issues can be discussed in consultation workshops. • work through the key points and determine in detail, the policy principles which fit under each key point or theme. Start with the phrase ‘the institution will ...’ as a prompt.
Write early and often	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write as you would normally, then edit to remove unnecessary and informal words, phrases or information that does not add value to the policy document.
Structure	
Keep the structure simple by using:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gender-neutral language - use "their" instead of "he/she" • short sentences (maximum of 15 words) by removing words that don't add meaning • short paragraphs (maximum of 100 words for policies; maximum 40 words for procedures) • lists – this makes documents easier to read, and encourages short sentences • consistency - repetition of familiar words increases comprehension.
Ensure long-term document currency by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoiding use of information that is quickly outdated and that therefore requires regular amendment (eg use departmental names and generic phone numbers rather than specific names or contact details) • providing links to generic web pages rather than specific web pages. <i>For example, refer to "Student Administration Forms" rather than the specific url for the form; refer to "Enterprise Agreement" rather than a specific clause.</i>
Titles	
Name a policy document to reflect content and for logical location	<p>Policy documents are listed alphabetically (and by category) on Policy Central, so the first letter of the first word is critical for easy searching. Ensure that the title:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ accurately reflects the content of the policy or procedure ○ does not start with words such as ‘the’, ‘that’ or ‘a’ ○ is succinct ○ of related documents have similar titles, and ○ avoids using generic first words such as ‘University’, ‘Policy’, ‘Code’ or ‘Procedure’.

Language	
<p>Write in plain English</p> <p>Be concise, succinct and explicit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use common words such as ‘often’ instead of ‘in most cases’: ‘before’ instead of ‘prior to’: ‘because’ instead of ‘due to the fact that’; ‘use’ instead of ‘utilise’ • rather than ‘<i>Submit the appropriate form</i>’ say ‘<i>Submit the Withdrawal from Program form</i>’ • if a decision or action is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>mandatory</i>, then use ‘must’ or ‘will’ or ‘is required’ ○ <i>recommended</i> or valid reasons to deviate from the requirement exist in particular circumstances, then use ‘should’ ○ <i>permissive</i>, then use ‘may’. • avoid the word ‘shall’ unless there is a legislative requirement that prescribes its use. This word causes confusion between whether an action is <i>mandatory</i> or <i>recommended</i> • use short words (one or two syllables) • use active, rather than passive language • write as you would speak, editing out informal words or phrases • avoid the use of jargon, unnecessary technical expressions, and fancy vocabulary.
<p>Be consistent with the use of terms and context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refer to the University Glossary for key acronyms, abbreviations, terminology and definitions in use at the University • do not use acronyms without first using the full title/term before using the acronym • follow the University’s Style Guide.
<p>Policies (refer Policy Template)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express principles, intent, values, and expectations to assist or direct decision-making and operations in the University • are usually expressed in standard sentence and paragraph format. <p>When writing a policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • start sentences with the phrase ‘the institution will ...’ as a prompt • establish and describe ‘what will be done’ rather than ‘what will not be done’ • include what the principles, intent, values, and expectations are, when they apply and to whom they apply.
<p>Procedures (refer Procedure Template / Flowchart Template (PDF) / Key Shapes)</p> <p>Note - to access the Flowchart template in Microsoft Visio format contact policy@mq.edu.au</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the actions undertaken to achieve the policy intent • identify the position title of the person responsible for undertaking each action <p>When writing a Procedure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include a workflow (flowchart) showing the actions needed and the position title of the person responsible for completing those actions. • if necessary, supplement with further Instructions to describe the required actions. Start with an action verb e.g. ‘Submit completed form to Academic Unit; rather than ‘The student should complete the form and then submit it to the Academic Unit’. • avoid too much detail and link to other detailed work instructions as appropriate • Include related documents, forms, work instructions etc in the ‘Key Related Documents’ section.
<p>Schedules (refer Schedule Template)</p>	<p>Structure the information into a table where possible (eg criteria for promotion).</p>