POLICY WRITING GUIDE

University of Houston ◢ Clear Lake

POLICY WRITING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

University policies affect the entire University community – students, faculty, staff, visitors, patients, and others. Policies should allow users to find what they need, understand what they find, and use what they find to meet their needs. This guide provides information for drafters and users of university policies related to organization, style, formatting, and language. This guide will cover the following topics related to that and other University policies addressing policy management:

- Guidelines for writing policy
- Policy outline and formatting
- Policy approval workflow

WRITING A POLICY

What is a policy?

University policies are clear, simple statements of how the University intends to do business. They allow the University to identify requirements and define expected behaviors. They also provide a set of guiding principles to help with decision making.

Policies fall into three categories:

- Policies that enhance the mission of the University
- Policies that ensure compliance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations; or
- Policies that promote operational effectiveness and efficiencies and reduce institutional risk.

Policy vs. Procedures

Policies and procedures go together to clarify what needs to be done and how to do it. Procedures should always have an associated policy. Procedures describe how the policy will be put into action by outlining what steps must be taken, roles and responsibilities, and which forms or documents to use.

While policies have a defined template, the format for procedures can vary depending on the content. Sometimes the information can be covered with just a few bullet points, other times detailed step-by-step instructions are required. Procedures can also be organized as forms, checklists, or flowcharts.

In some cases, it may be necessary to combine policy and procedures in the same document, but most often it is best to keep the two separates. This gives the department more flexibility to

change or update internal procedures as needed without the need to put them through the policy review workflow.

Policy Language

- Policies should be clear, concise, and written in third person.
- Keep the language simple and the sentences short.
- Write for your Audience. Since the audience can vary, the nest practice is to write for an 8th grade level.
- Words need to be selected carefully. Works such as *should* and *may* imply choice.
- Do not use information that may quickly become outdated such as employee names or names of software products unless such information is specifically required. For example, certain regulations require an individual to be named as the contact for reporting.
- When using acronyms, spell out the words the first time, then indicate the acronym in parenthesis, e.g., Division of Administration and Finance (DA&F).
- Avoid complex tables and graphics.
- Use gender-inclusive language.

APPROVED POLICY TEMPLATE (UHCL Policy Website)

The approved policy template (Appendix A) is composed of the following sections.

1. Policies and rules have seven parts:

   a. Purpose and Scope

   b. Policy Information

   c. Definitions

   d. Procedure

   e. Review and Responsibilities

   f. Revision Log

   g. References

2. Purpose and Scope

   a. The purpose describes the reasons for the University to have the policy or rule adopted and implemented. What are the general and specific objectives of having such a policy in place?

   b. The scope should say to whom the policy or rule applies. The policy itself should match the scope. For example, if the scope says that a policy applies only to staff members, the policy should be written to apply specifically to staff members, rather than employees, which is a broader category than the defined scope.

3. Policy Information

   a. All requirements in a regulation should be in this section.

   b. Policy Information section should use the following format:

      A. Heading

         1. First provision related to the heading

            a. Further clarification about provision 1.

               i. Further clarification about provision 1a.

      (Use as many of each level of subordination as needed.)

4. Definitions

   a. Definitions should be in alphabetical order.

   b. Definitions do not include requirements; instead, requirements should be in Policy Information Section. Look for words like "Shall" and "may" in the definitions to see if those provisions should be in policy instead.

   c. Each definition should say "Term" means _____.

d. When possible, use definitions for commonly defined terms, such as "employee," "faculty," etc. from other regulations instead of recreating them.

e. Always use the defined term instead of synonyms, but do not use a defined term to mean something other than the way it is defined.

f. A defined term should be capitalized each time it is used throughout policy so that readers are aware it is a defined term within the policy.

5. Procedures

a. Procedures should be general and brief, if needed.

b. Do not list specific employee names or computer applications, as these both can change.

c. Only use this section is the procedure is very general and always done the same way.

6. Review and Responsibility

a. In this section, list the position considered the Subject Matter Expert on the policy.

b. Identify a review schedule for the policy. Most UHCL policy is reviewed every 3 or 5 years.

c. If there is a specific time that the policy must be reviewed by to be included in the academic or fiscal year, state that information in this section.

7. Review Log

a. Any deletions, revisions, or amendments must be noted in the Review Log followed by the date the changes are made.

8. References

a. Any mentioned federal or state laws or regulations, SAMs, or MAPs must have a link to the actual law, regulation, SAM, or MAP in this section.

For more information, see Appendix

Revising A General Policy

When revising an existing policy, drafters should clearly show what they are proposing to add or delete to the policy by showing additions in red font and underlined and showing deletions in red struck through font. Drafters do this by:

- using track changes in Microsoft Word;

- Provide an original copy and a redline copy of the proposed policy changes to the Office of General Counsel with this form: General Counsel Policy Review Request.

- When revising an existing policy, drafters should apply the guidance in this guideline to existing parts of the policy, including those that the drafter is not substantively changing.

Font and Formatting

All policies should be drafted in Ariel 12-point font with standard 1-inch margins when they are presented to the Office of General Counsel, the appropriate shared governance committee, and the University Council.

Publication of Policies

- Following the final approval step for each policy, policies are published on uhcl.edu "University Policies" web page and included on the recently revised quarterly newsletter.
- Policy writers are encouraged to notify stakeholders of changes in policy upon publication.

Communications

One of the most important pieces of policy management is ensuring that new and revised policies are communicated effectively. It is expected that the originating department will be responsible for ensuring that the appropriate individuals are notified. Evaluating internal documents and websites to ensure consistency with new and revised policy is strongly advised. In developing a communication plan, the following avenues should be considered:

- Add it to the agenda to be covered in regular department/divisional meetings.
- Include a notice in divisional newsletters.
- Submit for inclusion in campus-wide news.
- Feature it on your departmental website.

POLICY APPROVAL WORKFLOW

After the Subject Matter Expert drafts the proposed policy using the Policy Template, the document will need to be reviewed by University of Houston System (UHS) Office of General Counsel using the General Counsel Policy Review Request form.

After the UHS Office of General Counsel returns the proposed policy document to the Subject Matter Expert, the proposed policy needs to be emailed to the appropriate Shared Governance Committee chairperson two weeks before the meeting date for inclusion on the agenda.

At the Shared Governance Committee meeting, the proposed policy will be read and questioned, and then voted on. If the proposed policy passes, it needs to be emailed to the University Council for inclusion on their agenda. If the proposed policy is not passed, suggested changes can be made to the policy and presented to the UHS Office of General Counsel and placed back on the appropriate Shared Governance Committee agenda for next month's meeting.

When the proposed policy reaches the University Council, the policy will be read, questioned, and voted on. If the policy passes, it will be signed and posted on the University of Houston Clear

Lake Policy library website within the week. An email will be sent with a copy of the signed policy and confirmation that the policy is posted to the subject matter expert.

If the policy fails at University Council, the Subject Matter Expert can revise the policy and present it to the UHS Office of General Counsel and the Shared Governance Committee with changes before presenting it to University Council.

For more information, see MAP 01.A.01 and Appendix B.

Minor changes will be handled in office with the assistance of the Subject Matter Expert.

PERIODIC REVIEW

All policies must be reviewed annually to ensure they are accurate and kept up to date. Subject Matter Experts will be notified by email in September for annual review:

- Check all links to make sure they are still valid.
- Verify that the contact and their title is accurate.
- Look for any procedural information that may have changed.

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APPENDIX A

SECTION: _____   **Number:** _____

AREA: _____

SUBJECT: _____

I.   **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**
Provides a rationale for the policy or procedure. The rationale may be a reference to a legal requirement, a statement of the goals which the policy is attempting to facilitate, or some other description of the reasons for the implementation of the policy or procedure.

II. **POLICY INFORMATION**
Explains in clear language what the policy entails and its objectives.

III. **DEFINITIONS**
Provides a glossary of specialized terms and their meanings to help the reader understand uncommon vocabulary or references.

IV. **PROCEDURE**
Explains the steps, forms, or methods to achieve the objectives of the policy.

V.   **REVIEW AND RESPONSIBILITIES**
Designates the responsible department manager or division head and defines the review frequency.

VI. **REVISION LOG**
Lists previous issues and revision and reaffirmation dates of the policy. Reaffirmation dates will be placed below the issue number to which they correspond. For the first issue of the policy, the following statement shall be added under the Policy History section: "No prior issues of this policy."

VII. **REFERENCES**
Identifies any authority or other information pertinent to the contents of the policy, such as state or federal legislation, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board rules, UH System Administrative Memoranda, etc. If there are no references in the policy, the following statement shall be added under the References section: "There are no references associated with this policy."

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MAP PROCESS FLOW CHART

Resp. Party identifies need to develop or update MAP

New Policy or Substantial Change/Update

Legal or Minor Update/Changes

Resp. Party/SME Policy Formation

Legal or Minor Update/Change

Executive Policy Review

Legal Review

SGS Review
(AC, PBC, ULC, FSC)

1. Place on committee agenda

3. 10-Day Review

4. First Presentation

2. Second Presentation

University Council adopts as presented, adopts with amendment(s), or does not adopt

Adopts

Not Adopted

- ➤ AC = Academic Council
- ➤ PBC = Planning and Budgeting Committee
- ➤ ULC = University Life Committee
- ➤ FSC = Facilities and Support Services Committee

Documents forward to Policy Coordinator for processing

Process Termination