

A policy articulates requirements and expectations for behavior, actions and activities of the university community in order to fulfill expectations and strategic goals. A policy may require or prohibit an action, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations and mitigate risk.

## *General Guidelines to Writing Effective Policy*



Policies need to be concise, consistent and easy to read. Using clear and simple language increases the probability that the policy will be understood and followed.

Use short, everyday words when possible. Simple words are easier and faster to read for all levels of readers, and will aid in understanding.

Keep sentences brief. Longer sentences demand greater concentration from the reader and may make the meaning difficult to follow.

Choose words wisely. Use direct language like **must**, **will**, **prohibited** and **required** rather than *should*, *should not*, *shall* and *may* as these words may imply an action is not mandatory.

Be consistent. Make sure that examples and clarifying statements do not convey different meanings or interpretations.

Double-check that policy language does not conflict with already existing policies and procedures and all your information is factual and up-to-date.

Do not include personal names, specific labels (e.g., software product names) or other information that may quickly become outdated. Instead, use position titles and generic terms.

Spell out acronyms the first time they are used.

Do not use contractions, personal pronouns or idioms.

**Associated Press (AP) Stylebook** has been formally adopted by VCU. Refer to the **VCU Brand Standards Guide** for additional information. Some examples include:

- Lowercase “university” when referring to VCU
- Do not capitalize a formal academic or administrative title unless it immediately precedes a personal name
- Do not use hyphens for “universitywide” and “campuswide”
- Capitalize the name of a college, school or department only when using the full, proper name of a specific VCU unit; use lowercase when using the informal name



# Policy & Procedures Writing Guide

Use the standard **VCU Policy Template** for creating and updating policies. Descriptions and writing suggestions for each section are outlined below. For additional information, refer to the policy on **Creating and Maintaining Policies & Procedures**.

## *Policy Template Sections*

### Policy Title

The title expresses the purpose and description of the policy.

### Basic Policy Information

**Policy Type** must be one of the following:

- Board of Visitors
- Administrative
- Interim
- Local

See the policy on **Creating and Maintaining Policies & Procedures** for definitions.

**Responsible Office** is accountable for the accuracy, education and training, enforcing and monitoring compliance, and timely reviews and updates of the policy.

**Initial Policy Approved** indicates the date of final approval was acquired for the original policy.

**Current Revision Approved** indicates the date of the most recently approved revision.

### Policy Statement and Purpose

This section describes the purpose, key requirements and expectations of the policy and includes reference to consequences of noncompliance, including disciplinary actions, when appropriate. It should reference any external regulations and clearly state the objectives of the policy. Consider:

- What legal and regulatory requirements are being addressed?
- What financial, operational or other needs is the policy addressing?
- What issue is the policy intending to address?
- Are there any major conditions or restrictions?
- Are there any exclusions or special situations to address?
- What are the consequences of noncompliance?

Details on how the policy was developed are not to be included. Procedural steps are addressed in the “Policy Specifics and Procedures” section.

### Table of Contents

Ensure page numbers are correct.



# Policy & Procedures Writing Guide

## Who Should Know This Policy

State the primary audience—who needs to know and/or follow the policy.

## Definitions

Prepare an alphabetical list of key terms and definitions that aid in the reader’s understanding of the policy or procedures such as:

- New, uncommon and/or specialized terms
- Terms that have different meanings in different contexts
- Do not include any requirements in a definition

## Contacts

List the unit/department that is responsible for interpreting the policy and obtaining approval for revisions, and the title/position of the person to contact to answer policy-related questions.

## Policy Specifics and Procedures

This section is used to elaborate on the “Policy Statement and Purpose” section above and to communicate the mandatory actions/operational processes/steps required to comply with the policy, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations and mitigate risk. The procedures should:

- Be listed in the order that they should occur and clearly detail who performs the procedure, what steps should be taken, and how the steps should be performed

- Be consistent with the policy statement and related documents
- Include implementation plans and dates for policies that require a phased implementation

## Some tips for writing procedures:

- Draft procedures with the reader in mind. Well-developed steps provide benefit to both the reader and policy owner.
- Make the relationship to the policy clear by explaining how the procedure helps the campus achieve its goals or strategic plan. This helps ensure understanding and compliance.
- It is highly recommended to involve key stakeholders and subject matter experts in the development of procedures. This creates a sense of ownership and will help to avoid errors.

## Forms

List any VCU forms applicable to the policy. Necessary federal or state forms should also be included. Hyperlinks should be provided to internal forms to allow readers to quickly access the latest version of forms. The responsible office is accountable for maintaining forms.

## Related Documents

These are documents that are critical to the development of the policy and procedures. Related documents include federal/state policies and regulations, VCU policies and any supplemental attachments such as flowcharts, process maps, guidelines, matrices and/or manuals. List these documents in the order in which they appear in the policy. Avoid using hyperlinks to external sources.



## Policy & Procedures Writing Guide

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### Revision History

This section is a record of policy revisions and the date on which the revisions were approved.

### FAQ

List common questions asked by employees (or that you anticipate employees will ask) regarding the policy. Be sure to include clearly written response.

