



Tips for Writing and Developing Western Sydney University Policy Documents

General Principles

1. Understand the difference between the different types of Policy Documents e.g., policy, procedure, guidelines. The hierarchy of policy documents is included in clause (7) of the [Policy Framework](#).
Policies contain principle high-level statements and use values-based language communicating clearly the purpose and expectations of the Policy.
Procedures contain the key mandatory steps and responsibilities the reader needs, to comply with the overarching Policy.
2. Use the Policy DDS template as all policy documents (except for Guidelines) are published in the Policy DDS and are required to be in the template form. Use the template to your advantage. The template has Sections, Parts and 2 levels of sub-headings that can help readers and authors. Use parts to break the document up into relevant chunks, then use sub-heading 1 and sub-heading 2 to break those parts down into smaller, digestible and manageable chunks. Sections, Parts, sub-heading 1 and sub-heading 2 are also used to populate the navigation bar (or table of contents) in the Policy DDS when the policy document is published. The navigation bar provides a hyperlink to the appropriate part of the document.
3. Also, parts and sub-headings provide a hierarchy to the document that assists screen readers (e.g., used by sight impaired people) in ordering the information.
4. Use plain English as the readers of a policy document are not experts on the subject matter. Use short, common, informal words that convey the meaning clearly. Use active voice and put statements in a positive form. Stick to the same tense and avoid ambiguous terms such as should or may. If there is an exception, make this clear.
5. Use a clear and logical structure. Policy document titles should include the name of the head policy so they appear together in the A to Z listing in the Policy DDS. Use the headings available in the template (Section, Part, major heading and minor heading). Try not to use the same heading twice within a policy document. It may not be possible in all cases but consider using a table instead of a long list.
6. Use inclusive language that demonstrates respect for and includes all people. Use gender neutral language and pronouns. The acronym LGBTIQ+ may be used, but it is preferred to refer to 'sexuality, sex and gender diversity' to be more inclusive where possible. Always use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in full and don't abbreviate to 'ATSI'. Policy Documents should never use pejorative or inappropriate language for people with disabilities. Only refer to age when relevant to the context and when it is necessary. Where the policy document will be relied upon by people whose first language may not be English, try to make language choices that can be readily understood by a person with IELTS 5 level English proficiency.
6. Use direct and succinct sentences that in most cases average 22 words. Where long sentences contain a list of points, break them into subclauses to make them more readable. Avoid joining sentences together with ands and buts. Clauses can be more than one sentence.
7. Edit and cross-check your work. Be aware that an amendment might effect the rest of the policy document. Read the entire document even when making minor amendments.

Tips and Tricks

▪ **Definitions**

When a word is not commonly used and understood in English expression, or where a term is being used by the University in a specific or different way to its common meaning, it should be included in the definitions for that Policy Document. Don't define a term that is not used in the policy document.

Terms used across Policy Documents need to be used consistently, with a common understanding of what they mean in every instance. These definitions are added to the DDS Policy Glossary. Check the DDS Glossary before redefining a term in a policy document. The definition in the DDS Glossary has been approved for use across all policy documents in the Policy DDS. If you believe a term has universal application across policies and should be included in the DDS Glossary, contact Policy and Governance.

▪ **Avoid internal cross-referencing**

Try not to refer to another clause within a policy document. If the clause numbering changes due to the insertion or deletion of other clauses, this can make the internal cross-reference incorrect. Consider whether the internal cross-referencing is actually necessary; if so consider referring to the section or part, rather than the specific clause.

Also be aware of referring to a specific clause or part of another policy document; if that policy document changes, your references may be out-of-date. Again, consider being more generic in referencing such as just referring to the other policy document.

▪ **Be aware of the requirements of and impact on other policy documents**

No policy document is an island. If you are changing a policy look at the associated information to see what other policy documents are relevant to it and check them to see if the changes you are making result in the need to make changes in other documents.

▪ **Be judicious with cross-referencing to other sources**

Instead of duplicating information, we suggest cross-referencing to the source document. However, using too many cross-references can be distracting and confusing to readers as they will have to jump to another document to get the information they need. Use cross-referencing to support your policy document not to be your policy document.

▪ **Check associated information**

Authors should always check that any associated information is up-to-date and relevant to the current version of the policy. Associated information may be hyperlinks to other policy documents, websites or direct links to other important documents such as forms, flowcharts and schedules. It is not designed to be the repository of supplementary documentation. For example, forms that need to be completed as part of a policy document process should be located on the owning unit's web page or in WesternNow Knowledge Articles.

▪ **Clarify days used as a timeline/deadline**

For example, "the form must be submitted within five days" – is that calendar days or working days? Apply the same clarification throughout the policy document, i.e., always use either working days or calendar days not both, e.g., "the forms must be submitted within five working days and the committee will respond within 14

calendar days” is confusing to the reader. This also applies to other timeframes used in policy documents such as one month, 4 weeks, 12 months and 1 year. Apply these consistently within the same and related policy documents.

- **Committees must have gender balance and diversity**

When referring to a committee within a policy document there must be provision to comply with the [Gender Equity Policy](#). Also, consideration should be given to diversity of the committee membership. The easiest way to do this within the policy document is to “consider gender balance and diversity when nominating appointments or nominees” or to give the committee chair the ability to appoint additional members to ensure gender balance or diversity mix. Diversity is especially important for committees that are making decisions about a diverse range of cultures including indigenous Australians or special cohorts such as people with a disability.

- **Delegations must be consistent with the Delegations of Authority Policy**

Where there is a delegation or approval process within a policy document it should match the delegation as outlined in the [Delegations of Authority Policy](#). If the relevant delegation schedule is silent, a delegation can be included in the policy document, but it should align with the Delegation Schedules. Contact Policy and Governance if you believe the delegation should be added to the Delegation Schedules.

- **Refer to Western Sydney University at first use**

Reference to the full title, e.g., Western Sydney University only needs to be used in the first occurrence. After this ‘the University’ should be used.

- **Don’t over-use capitals**

Just because a term is defined in the definitions section, there is no need to capitalise it when it is used in the policy document. There is also no need to capitalise students, academic or professional staff, unit head or other generic terms.

- **Don’t refer to the policy within the policy**

If you want to refer to the policy document within the policy document don’t use its title again, just say “this policy” or “these procedures”.

- **Headings should be concise**

Avoid repeating words within parts and sub-headings. e.g.,

- Part A – Enrolment for Current Students
 - o Enrolments for Current Overseas Students
 - Enrolment for Current Overseas Students that have Been Excluded
 - Enrolment for Current Overseas Students that have Been Excluded Returning to Study

- **Is it likely to change frequently?**

If you have a dollar limit, time limit, telephone number list or the like, that will be reviewed from time to time, consider putting in into a schedule or a webpage linked to the policy document. This way a new version of the policy document does not have to be approved for each change.

- **Information provided in a list should be in alphabetical order**
Unless there is a very good reason not to, e.g., for hierarchy of positions, then all lists should be alphabetical, including definitions.
 - **Numbers**
Use the following numbering convention: one to ten – written as text, 11 and over, written as numbers. There are some exceptions, for example where a number is used in a title – e.g., 3 Day Loan.
 - **Think about the timing in releasing new versions of policy documents**
A new version of a policy document relating to students taking effect in the middle of a teaching session can lead to confusion for students about what version applies to them. Perhaps hold over the date of effect to the start of the next semester.
 - **Placeholders in the Policy DDS**
The Policy DDS includes placeholders in the system for position titles, committee names and all associated information. Terms included within the Policy DDS Glossary are also hyperlinked in the policy document, so you don't need to put in a definition. It is helpful to be consistent in the naming of associated information, i.e., don't refer to the same webpage link with a different name.
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