



## POLICY WRITING STYLE GUIDE

Below are some general guidelines for writing policies.

- Less is more. A policy need not be lengthy. In many instances, shorter is better. The goal of the policy is to clearly and concisely convey a high-level plan to accomplish a goal or communicate a statement of declaration. Longer policies can be difficult to understand, interpret, and apply.
- Policies in the Regents Policy Manual should not include procedures to carry out the policy. Policies in the University Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual should include high-level procedures that help the reader to understand how to comply with or benefit from the policy. Detailed procedures should be developed by the policy owner or their designee, and housed on the departmental website.
- Keep it simple. Policies should be written in plain language, not legalese or jargon only familiar to the process owner. Avoid overly-technical language. The policy should be easily understood by the entire university community.
  - Use a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level as determined by the [Hemingway Editor](#), or other writing/comprehension tools.
  - Do not use passive voice (avoid “normally”, “generally”; use “will”, “must”)
  - Use simpler alternatives (use “many” instead of “multiple”, use “but” instead of “however”)
- Use gender-inclusive language.
  - Do not use masculine or feminine pronouns as the default; use “they” or “their” instead of he/his/her/hers
  - Avoid using gendered-nouns and terms such as chairman, man, mankind, grandfathered. Instead use gender-neutral nouns and terms such as chair, department head, coordinator, community, individual, person, evergreened.
- Write with one voice throughout. Use third person, present tense.
- Write for the audience (entire university community). Assume readers have basic knowledge of the campus and university community but no knowledge of specific matters addressed in the policy.
- The policies are our highest-level guiding documents. Strive for language that will remain relevant and continue to guide UNM for 15-20 years.
- Use enforceable language. Without enforceable language, a policy is ineffective and creates confusion.
  - Do not use the word “ensure,” because the University largely cannot ensure actions of its community members. Use “must”, “will”, “will not” instead of “should” or “may”, unless options are provided in the policy or compliance is not mandatory.



- Never use names of UNM personnel in policies. Avoid using official titles of UNM personnel unless the title is essential to policy clarity, compliance, enforcement, or appeal.
- Use consistent terminology throughout.
  - University, or Institution?
  - Leadership, or Administration?
  - Acronyms, when used, should be defined within the policy, and consistent throughout.
- Be clear when indicating requirements. Examples below may be used in place of “shall”:
  - “must” for an obligation
  - “must not” for a prohibition
  - “may” for a discretionary action
  - “should” for a recommendation
- Omit excess words. Examples may include:
  - is able to = can
  - be responsible for = must
  - in accordance with = under
  - in order to = to
  - in the event that = if, or when
  - as long as = if/then (unless referring to the continuation of time)
- Spell check and grammar check before submitting for review.