



# University Policy Writing Guide

Office of the MSU Denver President  
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## Introduction

A University policy is a statement of principles guiding the actions of MSU Denver students, employees, and/or community members. University policies and procedures align University operations with MSU Denver's mission, strategic plan, and core values, along with external rules and requirements, including federal and state laws, regional accreditation criteria, and best practices in higher education. University policies are approved by the MSU Denver Board of Trustees for governance policies and the MSU Denver President for operational policies.

University policies serve as MSU Denver's *guiding principles*.

This guide assists policy champions, sponsors, and responsible offices with writing policies. The guide outlines the key elements of the University policy proposal and template, as well as stylistic and mechanical tips for drafting clear and concise policies.

The University policy development process is supported by the MSU Denver Office of General Counsel within the Office of the President. Please contact the Policy Administrator at [policy@msudenver.edu](mailto:policy@msudenver.edu) for assistance.

## Key Elements of the University Policy Development Guide

For ease of reference, University-wide policies are published in the online University Policy Library using a standard University Policy Template. The template requires key pieces of information that must be included along with the policy. Some information, such as *Procedures, Definitions, Sanctions, and Related Information*, may be included as part of the template but is not required if it does not apply to a particular policy.

### REQUIRED COMPONENTS

#### Basic University Policy Information

**Policy Title** - A brief, descriptive heading for the policy. Typically, the word *policy* is not included at the end of the title.

#### Policy Statement

What to include:

- Who is the primary audience? Who needs to follow the policy?
- What is expected of the employee or student? What are the major conditions or restrictions?
- In what situation(s) does this policy not apply? Are there exclusions or special situations?

What not to include:

- Background details
- Operating procedures

**Authority** - The individual or entity with the power or right to enforce and to make decisions regarding a particular policy. If authority over the policy is granted through legislation, the specific legislation or other requirement should be referenced in this section. University policies are approved by the MSU Denver Board of Trustees for governance policies and the MSU Denver President for operational policies. A general statement regarding MSU Denver Board of Trustees and Presidential authority is included in the University policy template.

**Purpose** - The purpose of the policy includes a brief description and justification for adopting the policy. The purpose may include the problem or conflict the policy is designed to resolve and should reference regulatory or legal reasons for the policy, if applicable.

**Scope** - The scope of a policy identifies the University population to which a particular policy applies. Some University policies apply to all members of the University community regardless of affiliation as an employee, student, or other group. Other University policies apply to a subset of the entire University population, such as *all students*, *all employees*, or *all faculty*.

University policies generally apply across all units of the University, including divisions, colleges, academic departments, and administrative departments. Policies in effect for only one division, college, or department are not considered University-wide policies.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

University policies are approved by the MSU Denver Board of Trustees for governance policies and the MSU Denver President for operational policies. When revising an MSU Denver Board of Trustees or President's policy statement, identifying the University executive, administrator, and office responsible for overseeing implementation, operation, and communication of the policy is essential. The President's Office serves as a liaison with the Responsible Office when questions on a particular University policy arise.

- **Responsible Executive** - The University Officer or other authorized institutional official responsible for high-level oversight and stewardship of the policy. Typically, the President or one of the vice presidents or associate vice presidents is listed as the responsible executive for a University-wide policy
- **Responsible Administrator** - The Responsible Administrator is the University officer or other authorized, institutional official responsible for overseeing operation of and compliance with the policy. As the subject matter expert, the responsible administrator or designee drafts the proposed policy or revision, incorporates feedback from the University community, implements the policy once approved, and trains the campus community on the policy or revision.

- **Responsible Office/Policy Contact** - The Policy Contact is the position or office to contact with questions on the policy.
- **Other Roles and Responsibilities** - Other roles and responsibilities that are necessary to carry out operation of a policy are included in this section.

## OPTIONAL COMPONENTS

- **Definitions** - Any ambiguous or technical terms included in the policy that could be subject to interpretation if undefined. For instance, a *Minors on Campus* policy might define the term *minor* to exclude students under the age of 18, who have a legitimate reason for being on campus unattended by an adult.
- **Procedures** - The **step-by-step actions** required to operate or comply with a policy. Some policies require only a few steps in the process, while other policies require multiple sub-processes and steps. Operating procedures may be included with the policy but are not required.
- **Related Information** - Related information includes any related laws, regulatory requirements, policies, procedures, guidelines, training materials, webpages, and requirements for accreditation and external funding, including federal and state funding, that should be referenced in relation to a particular policy.
- **Sanctions** - Sanctions include any disciplinary action or penalties for non-compliance with a policy. Sanctions are optional and may be omitted if they do not apply to a particular policy.

## Style and Mechanics Guide

When writing new or revised policies, consider the following tips...

### Be Concise

Being **concise** means using as few words as possible to get your point across. Consider which words are essential to convey your meaning.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Voice

Policies should be written in third-person voice.

### Voice

- 1<sup>st</sup> Person - I must...
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Person - You must...
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Person - Students must...**

### Acronyms

When using acronyms, spell out the words the first time and include the acronym in parentheses afterward—for example, Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) and Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE).

### Avoid Jargon

Policies should be written in plain language. Avoid using jargon and other technical terms that may only be understood by a select audience familiar with that lingo.

### Timely Language

Avoid including information that may become quickly outdated. Use **generic**, instead of specific, terms. Use the **title of an individual** rather than the individual's name.

### Specific vs. Generic

Banner - Student Information System

Jane Smith - Registrar

[jane.smith@msudenver.edu](mailto:jane.smith@msudenver.edu) - [registration@msudenver.edu](mailto:registration@msudenver.edu)

## Verb Choice

Choose your verbs carefully. Verbs often imply what **level of choice** an individual has when carrying out an action included in the policy. Generally, policy writers should avoid using the verb *can*, which means that students or employees are *able to* rather than *required to* perform a particular action. Also, the verb *should* implies choice and is more appropriate for guidelines rather than policies.

### Verb - Meaning

- Must - Have to (does not imply choice)
- May - Allowed to (implies choice)
- Should - Ought to (implies choice)

### More examples:

- Students **are required to**...
- Faculty **are responsible for**...
- Employees **must**...

### For assistance drafting a University policy:

Contact the Policy Administrator at [policy@msudenver.edu](mailto:policy@msudenver.edu) or

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