

# Policy Style Guide for Major Review of Academic Regulations

This guide is intended to support the work of the subgroups for the major review who are looking at specific elements of the Universities regulations.

## Use plain English

1. Use familiar, everyday words that readers will understand and not using complicated jargon
2. Leave out the marketing talk – successfully written plain English will appeal to the reader
3. Use short but complete and direct sentences, where longer sentences are required, no more than three items of information
4. Where language is different from the main text eg. Aegrotat award this needs to be identified – should be incorporated into the glossary/dictionary. This will benefit those using screen readers, text-to-speech and where the language is unfamiliar

## Using active rather than passive voice

1. E.g. the registrar may approve exemptions to the policy RATHER THAN exemptions to the policy may be approved by the registrar

## Being clear when action is required

1. If an action is mandatory, use 'must' or 'will'
2. For prohibition use 'must not' or 'will not'
3. If an action is optional use 'may'
4. Avoid using 'should' as this implies that an action may not be necessary
5. Use of the word 'shall' is questionable

## Ensuring language reflects the university's compliance obligations

1. E.g. using phrases such as 'students have the right to...' rather than 'students can....'

## Consistent terminology

1. A list/glossary of terminology for consistency

## Gender neutral and inclusive language

1. Use 'their' rather than 'he/she'
2. Avoid medical model language eg. "Students with disabilities", should be "disabled students"
3. There is a [guide to inclusive language use on gov.uk](#) section 2

## Formatting

1. Keep the layout consistent throughout, it is easier to navigate and process for those with cognitive issues, visual loss or whose first language is not English
2. Avoid dense blocks of text, try to break into smaller chunks. Bullet points can be used to break up long blocks of text
3. If possible avoid using tables as these are difficult to ensure accessibility when using assistive technology. If tables are used they should be clearly labelled and where possible, equivalent text explanation given. They should only be used for data and splitting cells should be avoided
4. Avoid using colour as a descriptor or in an icon eg. Please look at the text in blue ... Avoid using pale blue text as this is the first colour to have impact on someone with visual loss and the hardest to access
5. Keep text left aligned and spacing between lines is at least a space and a half. This supports those using assistive technology and ensures a person can find the start and end of each line. The spacing is particularly supportive for someone with visual loss or cognitive issues
6. Where links are incorporated in documents they should be accessible to assistive technology and these must be clear to the user in description. This should be the only time underlined is used in the text (see example above in section on gender neutral language)
7. Ensure no words are hyphenated at the end of lines as this can cause issues for those using screen readers or with visual loss
8. If images or flow charts are used think how this content can be made accessible – as with tables a text explanation should be offered

[Crystalmark free guides to writing plain english](#)

[Web accessibility in Mind \(WebAIM\) guidance on hyperlinks](#)