

# PLAIN LANGUAGE BEST PRACTICES: SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**A MODEL FOR B.C. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**



Ministry of  
Advanced Education  
and Skills Training



## Plain Language Best Practices



# Plain Language Best Practices

*Sexualized Violence Policies and Procedures*

WEST COAST EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

VICTORIA, B.C.



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# Accessibility Statement

The web version of *Plain Language Best Practices* (<https://opentextbc.ca/plbpsvpp/>) has been designed with accessibility in mind by incorporating the following features:

- It has been optimized for people who use screen-reader technology.
  - All content can be navigated using a keyboard
  - Links, headings, and tables are formatted to work with screen readers
  - Images have alt tags
- Information is not conveyed by colour alone.

## Other File Formats Available

In addition to the web version, this book is available in a number of file formats including PDF, EPUB (for eReaders), MOBI (for Kindles), and various editable files. Here is a link to where you can download the guide in another format (<https://opentextbc.ca/plbpsvpp/>). Look for the “Download this book” drop-down menu to select the file type you want.

## Known Accessibility Issues and Areas for Improvement

While we strive to ensure that this resource is as accessible and usable as possible, we might not always get it right. Any issues we identify will be listed below.

There are currently no known issues.

## Accessibility Standards

The web version of this resource has been designed to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>), level AA. In addition, it follows all guidelines in Accessibility Toolkit: Checklist for Accessibility (<https://opentextbc.ca/>

accessibilitytoolkit/back-matter/appendix-checklist-for-accessibility-toolkit/). The development of this toolkit involved working with students with various print disabilities who provided their personal perspectives and helped test the content.

## Let Us Know if You are Having Problems Accessing This Resource

If you have problems accessing this resource, please contact us to let us know so we can fix the issue.

Please include the following information:

- The name of the resource
- The location of the problem by providing a web address or page description.
- A description of the problem
- The computer, software, browser, and any assistive technology you are using that can help us diagnose and solve your issue (e.g., Windows 10, Google Chrome (Version 65.0.3325.181), NVDA screen reader)

You can contact us one of the following ways:

- Web form: BCcampus OpenEd Help (<https://collection.bccampus.ca/contact/>)
- Web form: Report an Error (<https://open.bccampus.ca/browse-our-collection/reporting-an-error/>)

This statement was last updated on May 14, 2021.

# Introduction

Using plain language is key to ensuring your written documents are easy to access, easy to understand, and easy to act on. Plain language is especially important for documents that are intended to empower the reader who may be under stress – which is the case for sexualized violence policies and procedures for post-secondary institutions. Clear *policies* inform readers what the institution stands for; clear *procedures* inform them how to get help and more information.

The purpose of this resource is to provide you with guidance on preparing and revising your own documents through the lens of plain language. By working through one example in detail, it shows you how to keep the focus on the reader, organize the information in order of importance, and use words that most readers will understand.

Of course, using plain language is just part of the process. Developing policies and procedures for large organizations – like post-secondary institutions – necessarily involves many stakeholders. For that reason, it's important to include others in any plain language review to ensure that your document balances plain language goals with legal and governance requirements.



# How to Use This Resource

This resource is intended to demonstrate best practices in reviewing writing for plain language and provide you with general information and resources on plain language.

It presents a model document in three different versions:

- Version 1: The original document with initial review comments identifying major areas to revise; includes some do's and don'ts.
- Version 2: The document showing track changes of major edits.
- Version 3: The final version of revised document.

By reading the comments, recommendations, and changes in the different versions, you will have the opportunity to learn how to write or revise your own documents following plain-language principles. You'll benefit the most if you take the time to compare the different versions and consider the annotations.


The A Plain Language Checklist ([#chapter-a-plain-language-checklist](#)) section provides a checklist of items to consider when reviewing writing for plain language, and the Other Resources ([#back-matter-other-resources](#)) section lists some useful plain-language resources.

## Navigating the Model Document

Each version of the model document is provided in two formats:

1. A PDF version of a Word document that can be downloaded and viewed in a PDF reader.
2. An replication of the Word document that can be read directly in this resource. This version was provided for screen reader accessibility, offline access, and improved readability. It contains the same content as the PDF version, but all comments are in footnotes.

If accessing this resource on the web, you can hover your cursor over the footnote number to see the comments. If you are using a screen reader, the content of a footnote will be read when the link for the footnote receives focus.

These Procedures set out the process for bringing Sexual Misconduct to the attention of the University and the process the University <sup>[3]</sup> will follow where such matters are brought to its attention. <sup>[4]</sup>	
<div>  Comment [EDITOR4]: DO: Write directly to the reader (i.e., use second person). DO: Shorten sentences. DON'T: Use passive voice </div>	
Disclosures, Complaints and Reports of Sexual Misconduct <sup>[2]</sup>	

If you click a footnote number, you will be taken to the list of comments, which are compiled at the end of the document. Once there, there is a small return arrow at the end of the footnote that will bring you back to your place in the document.

3. **Comment [EDITOR3]:** "Down" style (using lower case where possible) is always preferable. DO: Use standard punctuation. DO NOT: Capitalize words unless they are proper nouns or titles. ↵
4. **Comment [EDITOR4]:** DO: Write directly to the reader (i.e., use second person). DO: Shorten sentences. DON'T: Use passive voice ↵
5. **Comment [EDITOR5]:** DO: Consider how headings give the reader information (i.e., use verb forms to show action in headings). ↵

# MODEL DOCUMENT

The model is based on a portion of an original document from a post-secondary institution (identifiers have been removed).

Take the time to review each version and consider the changes and annotations. You'll see the evolution of the document and get a glimpse into the plain-language process.



# Version 1: Original with General Assessment Comments

In Version 1, the editor provided general comments on structure and content. Several comments include some plain language do's and don'ts; others pose questions to consider.

**BEST PRACTICE:** Consider how you could respond to the comments and questions to improve the document.

## *Plain Language Tip*

Before you start writing, ask these questions:

- Who is your reader?
- Why are you writing this document?
- What do you want to say?
- How will your reader use the document?

The document and accompanying comments for this chapter are provided in two ways:

1. As a PDF that can be downloaded: Student Sexual Misconduct Procedures: Version 1 [PDF] (<https://opentextbc.ca/plbpsvpp/wp-content/uploads/sites/346/2021/05/Version1.pdf>)
2. Directly in this resource in the following textbox. Comments are provided in footnotes.

## STUDENT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT PROCEDURES

### Definitions

Terms used in these Procedures are defined in the Policy.<sup>1</sup>

### Scope<sup>2</sup>

These Procedures set out the process for bringing Sexual Misconduct to the attention of the University and the process the University<sup>3</sup> will follow where such matters are brought to its attention.<sup>4</sup>

### Disclosures, Complaints and Reports of Sexual Misconduct<sup>5</sup>

If a person witnesses or experiences Sexual Misconduct or there is reason to believe Sexual Misconduct has occurred or may occur, the person may pursue one or more of the following options:

#### a. Disclosure

- i. A Disclosure is an informal notification to the University that Sexual Misconduct has occurred or that a person has reason to believe may occur. A Disclosure will not be treated as a Complaint and will not be formally investigated by the University unless the University believes there is an imminent risk of harm to a person or there is a legal requirement for the University to do so.<sup>6</sup>

1. **Comment [EDITOR1]:** A cross-reference to definitions may be helpful, but every effort should be made to write in a way that the reader doesn't have to rely on a list of definitions to understand the text. Wherever possible, terms should be defined within the text. DO: Use a glossary or list of definitions when needed, but make it as accessible as possible (i.e., keep it within the same document). DO: Use simple terms to avoid readers needing to cross-reference definitions. DON'T: Start a document with the definitions. Readers want information first: definitions belong at the end.
2. **Comment [EDITOR2]:** Good structure. Placing the scope (purpose) at the start immediately tells the reader what to expect.
3. **Comment [EDITOR3]:** "Down" style (using lower case where possible) is always preferable. DO: Use standard punctuation. DO NOT: Capitalize words unless they are proper nouns or titles.
4. **Comment [EDITOR4]:** DO: Write directly to the reader (i.e., use second person). DO: Shorten sentences. DON'T: Use passive voice
5. **Comment [EDITOR5]:** DO: Consider how headings give the reader information (i.e., use verb forms to show action in headings).
6. **Comment [EDITOR6]:** DO: Always review sections, lists, and paragraphs for internal structure.

- ii. A person making a Disclosure may make the Disclosure to any employee of the University or support person on campus (e.g., Counsellor, Nurse Practitioner, Doctor, Manager, Residence Advisor, Security, or Student Union).
- iii. A person who makes a Disclosure that they have experienced Sexual Misconduct may obtain supports (e.g., medical assistance, counselling) and where appropriate, reasonable academic accommodations, without making a Complaint or Report.

b. **Complaint**<sup>7</sup>

- i. A Complaint is a formal notification to the University of Sexual Misconduct, made by the person who experiences the Sexual Misconduct.
- ii. A Complaint must contain sufficient information and detail of the Sexual Misconduct for the University to initiate an investigation.
- iii. A person who is considering filing a Complaint may consult with a Counsellor or Wellness Coach who can answer questions and assist the individual with the Complaint process.
- iv. Upon receipt of a Complaint, the University will initiate a formal investigation as provided for in these Procedures.
- v. The person who files the Complaint may withdraw the Complaint at any time. However, the withdrawal of a Complaint does **not** guarantee that the Complaint will **not** be investigated or that there will be **no** consequences to any individuals flowing from the **Complaint**.<sup>8</sup>

c. **Report**

- i. A Report is notification to the RCMP of Sexual Misconduct that has occurred that a person reasonably believes rises to the level of criminal conduct.
- ii. Individuals who experience or witness Sexual Misconduct that rises to the level of criminal conduct are strongly encouraged to file a Report.
- iii. If a person advises the University that they intend to make a Report, the University will make available to them a support person on campus who can support them in making the Report.
- iv. The University, to the extent it is reasonable to do so and as permitted by law, will cooperate with any criminal investigation arising from a Report.

DON'T: Introduce ideas/steps before they have been explained or defined.

7. **Comment [EDITOR 7]:** Using lists is very helpful. DO: Check that the order of list items is logical for the reader. DO: Try to limit number of list items to five or six (ten maximum, depending on content and length of each list item). If more steps are needed, try to break into more than one list. DON'T: Use more than one sub-list after a main list.

8. **Comment [EDITOR 8]:** DO: Avoid overusing negatives. DON'T: Use double (or triple) negatives.

### Control over Process<sup>9</sup>

The University recognizes that individuals who have experienced Sexual Misconduct may wish to maintain control over whether and how their experience will be dealt with by the University. Which of the above option(s) the individual elects to pursue will impact on the level of that control.

- a. Where the University receives a Disclosure, the individual who has experienced Sexual Misconduct will retain substantial control over how their experience will be dealt with by the University. However, where an individual makes a Disclosure and does not file a Complaint, they will not have access to remedies that could flow from a substantiated Complaint and no sanctions or discipline will flow to anyone from the Disclosure.
- b. Where the University receives a Complaint, the University will carry out a full and impartial investigation. In such circumstances, the individual who has experienced the Sexual Misconduct will have less control over how their experience will be dealt with by the University. However, where a Complaint is substantiated, the individual who has experienced the Sexual Misconduct will have access to remedies they may not have access to through a Disclosure. Within the framework of the process for addressing Complaints and while ensuring procedural fairness, the University will, to the extent reasonably possible, take into account the wishes of the individual alleged to have experienced Sexual Misconduct.

The University may be required to initiate an investigation and/or report alleged Sexual Misconduct to the RCMP, even without the consent of the individual who has experienced the Sexual Misconduct, if:

- a. the allegation involves Sexual Misconduct involving a minor;
- b. applicable legislation requires the University to carry out an investigation; or
- c. the University has a reasonable belief that there exists a risk to the health or safety of a member of the University community.

Should the University initiate an investigation or inform the RCMP about alleged Sexual Misconduct without the consent of the individual who has experienced the Sexual Misconduct, the University will notify that individual that it has done so.

### Responding to Disclosures

Where an individual makes a Disclosure to an employee of the University or support person on campus that they have experienced Sexual Misconduct, the employee or support person should:<sup>10</sup>

9. **Comment [EDITOR9]:** Always consider structure from the point of view of the reader. QUESTIONS TO ASK: Does this section belong somewhere else? Does the heading clearly introduce the section? Would a reader expect to look for a section on control over process?
10. **Comment [EDITOR10]:** Here the document makes a 180-degree turn to talking to people receiving disclosures/complaints, rather than talking to the person who is making the disclosure/complaint, which veers from the stated scope of explaining how the university will respond. Editing is required to shift back to the reader while retaining this information. DO: Always write to the primary audience. DO: Consider producing different publications for different audiences (e.g., in this case, an

- a. listen without judgement;
- b. communicate that Sexual Misconduct is not the fault of the person who has experienced it;
- c. help the individual to identify and/or access available on or off campus services such as emergency medical care or counselling;
- d. respect the individual's right to choose the services they feel are most appropriate for them and the individual's right to decide whether to make a Complaint or a Report;
- e. recognize that disclosing Sexual Misconduct can be traumatic, and that an individual's ability to recall the events may be limited or otherwise impacted;
- f. respect the individual's choice about how much they disclose about their experience; and
- g. make every effort to respect confidentiality and anonymity.

Employees of the University to whom a Disclosure is made or who otherwise become aware of Sexual Misconduct are required to notify the Student Services Director (the "Director")<sup>11</sup> and, where appropriate,<sup>12</sup> University Security. The identities of the individuals involved in the Sexual Misconduct should only be disclosed where reasonably required for University purposes and/or for the purposes of protecting the health and safety of any individual.

The Director and/or University Security who receives the information will assess it and determine whether, based on that information, there is a risk to the health or safety of anyone. If so, the Director and/or University Security will take steps to protect the health and safety of those at risk. If not, and unless otherwise required by law, the University will not formally investigate a Disclosure.

Should a student, in making a Disclosure, request support or academic accommodation, the student and the Director will meet to discuss the request. Where there is a reasonable basis for the request, the Director will work together with the student and any instructors as appropriate, to ensure that the student receives all necessary reasonable support and/or academic accommodations, while maintaining confidentiality, to the extent that it is reasonably possible to do so.

#### Making a Complaint<sup>13</sup>

Complaints must be submitted in writing to the Student Services Director.

Complaints must include sufficient detail of the allegation of Sexual Misconduct to allow the University to conduct an investigation into the Complaint, including the following:

information document for university personnel on "how to help" may be in order). DON'T: Lose your focus

11. **Comment [EDITOR11]:** The practice of putting a term in short form in parentheses after the first use of the full term is generally not required unless there is any chance of misreading. DO: Eliminate unnecessary words
12. **Comment [EDITOR12]:** In what circumstances would notifying not be appropriate? DO: Review all language for clarity.
13. **Comment [EDITOR13]:** Structural issue: This section would be more logically placed with the information above about complaints. It is key to the purpose and scope of the whole document. DO: Keep topics together in one section.

- a. the date, time, and location of the alleged Sexual Misconduct;
- b. the names, and if available, contact information, of any individuals involved;
- c. the names, and if available, contact information, of any potential witnesses to the Sexual Misconduct; and
- d. a description of the incident in sufficient detail to provide the University with sufficient information for it to conduct an investigation.

The University recognizes that individuals who have experienced Sexual Misconduct may need some time before they are physically and/or emotionally capable and prepared to prepare and file a Complaint. However, in order to ensure the University is in a position to conduct a full and fair investigation, Complaints should be filed as soon as reasonably possible following the incident of Sexual Misconduct. Any material delay between the Sexual Misconduct and the filing of a Complaint could impact on the investigation and/or the outcome.

### Responding to Complaints

#### *Ensuring Health and Safety*

When the Director receives a Complaint, their first priority will be to ensure the health and safety of those involved and of all members of the University community. In order to do so, the Director may:

- a. meet with whomever they deem necessary to determine whether there is a threat to the health or safety of any member of the University;
- b. take action the Director deems appropriate to ensure the health and safety of any member of the University community; and
- c. contact the RCMP.

In doing so, the Director will maintain the confidentiality of individuals involved to the extent that it is reasonably possible to do so.

#### *Initial Complaint Review*

When the Director receives a Complaint, prior to commencing an investigation, the Director will review the Complaint and ensure that it contains sufficient detail necessary for the University to carry out an investigation.<sup>14</sup>

Where the Director determines there is insufficient detail in the Complaint, the Director will contact the individual who filed the Complaint, advise them of the deficiencies, and allow them the opportunity to provide further details in a timely manner.

Where the Director determines that a Complaint has sufficient detail necessary for the University to carry out an investigation, the Director will initiate the investigation process.

At any point prior to or during an investigation, the University may take interim measures to address any concerns it may have about the well-being of any member of the University pending the investigation, while minimizing the impact on other individuals involved and recognizing the principle of the presumption of innocence. Any interim measures relating to a Complaint should not be perceived as the University prejudging the Complaint.

14. **Comment [EDITOR14]:** Review text to assess whether information is better presented in list format

*When an Employee is Party to Complaint*<sup>15</sup>

Where the Complaint involves a student, the University will investigate the Complaint in accordance with the process set out in these Procedures except where a party to the Complaint is an employee of the University, in which case, the University will follow one of the following procedures in investigating the Complaint:

- a. Where a party to a<sup>16</sup> Complaint is a union employee whose employment is governed by a collective agreement that requires the University to investigate such Complaints in accordance with procedures provided therein, the University will investigate the Complaint in accordance with those procedures. In such circumstances, at the commencement of the investigation, the University will provide the student involved in the Complaint with a copy of those procedures.
- b. Where a party to a Complaint is an employee who is not subject to a collective agreement that requires the University to investigate such Complaints in accordance with procedures provided therein, the University will investigate the Complaint in accordance with the procedures provided for in the University's Respectful Workplace Policy. In such circumstances, at the commencement of the investigation, the University will provide the student involved in the Complaint with a copy of those procedures.

*Investigation*

Where the Director determines an investigation is to proceed under these Procedures, the Director will assess the Complaint and, depending on their assessment of the Complaint, their relevant knowledge and expertise, and any other factors they deem appropriate, will:

- a. carry out the investigation;
- b. delegate another individual at the University with the necessary knowledge and expertise to carry out the investigation internally; or
- c. engage an external investigator to carry out the investigation.

The Director will advise the parties to the Complaint that an investigation is proceeding under these Procedures, will advise them of the identity of the investigator, will notify them that the investigator will be in contact with them, and will offer both parties the option of seeking support in relation to the Complaint and/or investigation.

The investigator will carry out an investigation into the Complaint. The investigation process will be determined by the investigator and will take into account:

- a. the sensitive nature of the Complaint as a complaint of Sexual Misconduct; and
- b. the interests of all those involved in the Complaint;

15. **Comment [EDITOR15]:** Review logic of the hierarchy of headings. This heading indicates when an employee would make a complaint, but there is no parallel heading for when a student would make a complaint. DO: Make an outline for your document and use headings to keep structure strong and logical.

16. **Comment [EDITOR16]:** Avoid legalese. QUESTIONS TO ASK: Will the reader understand the phrase “party to a Complaint”? Is the term clear (in this case, there is more than one party to a complaint).

while ensuring procedural fairness.

The investigation process will include, but will not necessarily be limited to:

- a. allowing the complainant the opportunity to participate in the investigation and to provide further information as appropriate;
- b. notifying the respondent<sup>17</sup> of the allegations against them; and
- c. providing the respondent an opportunity to respond to the allegations.

Where requested by an investigator, all members of the University community are required to cooperate and fully participate in an investigation pursuant to these Procedures. Failure to do so may lead to sanctions or discipline up to dismissal or expulsion.

Where the investigator is not the Director, upon completion of the investigation, the investigator will provide the Director an investigation report which will include a determination of whether or not the Complaint is substantiated.

Following completion of the investigation, the Director will notify the parties to the Complaint of whether or not the Complaint was substantiated.

Where the Complaint is not substantiated, the respondent to the Complaint will not be subject to sanctions or discipline for the alleged conduct complained of in the Complaint.

Where a Complaint is substantiated, the University will take steps it determines appropriate to address the substantiated Complaint which may include:

- a. steps towards ensuring the health, safety and well-being of the individual who was subject to the Sexual Misconduct which, where appropriate, may include but are not limited to:
  - i. academic accommodations;
  - ii. transfer, movement, removal from classes, or restrictions on the individual who carried out the Sexual Misconduct; and/or
  - iii. other steps to eliminate or limit contact between the complainant and the individual who carried out the Sexual Misconduct;
- b. where the individual who carried out the Sexual Misconduct is a student or employee of the University, discipline, up to dismissal or expulsion;
- c. where the individual who carried out the Sexual Misconduct is not a student or employee of the University but has a connection to the University, i.e. contractors, suppliers, volunteers, or visitors who attend on campus, sanctions or any other action the University deems appropriate to address the substantiated Complaint; and
- d. any other remedies the University determines appropriate.

17. **Comment [EDITOR17]:** In regards to "complainant" and "respondent," avoid using words/terms that have not been defined or explained. DO: Use word/terms the audience will understand. DON'T: Use legal terms for a general audience.

# Version 2: Document Showing Track Changes

Version 2 shows the major changes made by the editor using Track Changes in Word. (Note that some portions are not shown for ease of reading; for example, where larger portions were moved from one place to another, the deleted portion is not shown.)

Track Changes can be hard to follow, but they are worth studying to see how the editor deleted unnecessary or repetitive words and phrases, reorganized content for better flow, and generally smoothed the language.

**BEST PRACTICE:** Review at least some of the tracked changes to study the plain language process.

## *Plain Language Tip*

To write effectively:

- Put the most important information first
- Use headings to help your reader find important information
- Write the way you speak
- Address your readers directly

The document and accompanying comments and edits for this chapter are provided in two ways:

1. As a PDF that can be downloaded: Student Sexual Misconduct Procedures: Version 2 [PDF] (<https://opentextbc.ca/plbpsvpp/wp-content/uploads/sites/346/2021/05/Version2.pdf>)
2. Directly in this resource in the following textbox. Comments are provided in footnotes. Deleted text is in red and has a line through it; added text is in blue and underlined. Throughout this version, nouns like “Sexual Misconduct” and “University” that had been capitalized in the previous version were changed to lower case.

## STUDENT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT PROCEDURES

### Definitions

Terms used in these procedures are as defined in the policy.

### Scope

These procedures ~~set out the process for bringing Sexual Misconduct to the attention of the and~~ explain the steps you can take to notify the university of an incident of sexual misconduct. They also explain the process the university will follow in cases of sexual misconduct. ~~where such matters are brought to its attention.~~

### How to Notify the University of Sexual Misconduct: Three Options<sup>1</sup>

~~If a person witnesses or experiences~~ If you<sup>2</sup> have experienced or witnessed sexual misconduct, ~~or there is reason to believe~~ or you know sexual misconduct has occurred or may occur, ~~the person may pursue one or more of the following options~~ you have three options to notify the university:

1. Making a disclosure<sup>3</sup>
2. Making a formal complaint
3. Reporting to the police

You can choose one, two, or all three of these options. For example, you may decide you want to make a disclosure, and then later elevate the notification to a formal complaint.<sup>4</sup>

The university recognizes that individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct may wish to maintain control over whether and how the university will deal with their experience. The choice you make on how to notify the university will affect your level of control.<sup>5</sup>

1. **Comment [EDITOR18]:** I have edited the heads to give more information; in this case, the reader now knows this section is “how to do it” rather than general information on disclosures, complaints, and reports
2. **Comment [EDITOR19]:** Plain language principle: wherever possible, write directly to the reader (use second person –“you”). **Comment [EDITOR20]:** Suggest putting “experienced” before “witnessed” so victims are addressed first.
3. **Comment [EDITOR21]:** Plain language principle: Use lists for readability and clarity
4. **Comment [EDITOR22]:** Examples help to clarify instructions.
5. **Comment [EDITOR23]:** I have moved this up from the original section on maintaining control and rearranged the information from that section throughout to make it clear in each choice provided

a. **Making a Disclosure.**

- i. A disclosure is an informal notification to the university that sexual misconduct has occurred or that ~~a person has~~ there is reason to believe it may ~~occur~~.<sup>6</sup>
- ii. ~~A person making~~ You can make a disclosure ~~may make the Disclosure~~ to any employee of the university or support person on campus (e.g., counsellor, nurse practitioner, doctor, manager, ~~Regional Principal~~, residence advisor, security, ~~or~~ students' union).
- iii. ~~A person who makes a Disclosure that they have experienced Sexual Misconduct~~ By making a disclosure that you have experienced sexual misconduct, you may obtain supports (e.g., medical assistance, counselling) and where appropriate, reasonable academic accommodations ~~without making a Complaint or Report~~.
- iv. The university will not formally investigate a disclosure unless the university believes there is an imminent risk of harm to someone or there is a legal requirement to do so. That means you will not have access to certain remedies and no one will be disciplined for what happened. If you want the university to investigate the sexual misconduct, you need to make formal complaint or a report to the police (see below).~~will not be treated as a Complaint and will not be formally investigated by the university unless the university believes there is an imminent risk of harm to a person or there is a legal requirement for the university to do so.~~

b. **Making a Complaint**

- i. A complaint is a formal notification to the university of sexual misconduct, made by the person who experiences the sexual misconduct.
- ii. ~~A person who is~~ If you are considering filing a complaint, you may consult ~~with~~ a counsellor or wellness coach who can answer questions and ~~assist the individual with the Complaint process.~~ help you with the process.
- iii. It is helpful to file a complaint as soon as possible after the incident of sexual misconduct. A delay in filing a complaint could affect the investigation and the outcome. However, the university recognizes that individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct may need some time before they are prepared to file a complaint.
- iv. Your complaint must be submitted in writing to the Student Services Director. It must contain sufficient information of the allegations of sexual misconduct to allow the university to conduct an investigation. This includes:
  - a. the date, time, and location of the alleged sexual misconduct;
  - b. the names, and if available, contact information, of any individuals involved; and
  - c. the names, and if available, contact information, of any witnesses.
- v. ~~Upon receipt of a complaint, the university~~ When the university receives the complaint, it will ~~initiate~~ begin a formal investigation. If the complaint is substantiated, you will have access to

6. **Comment [EDITOR24]:** I've reordered these steps (and split one into two) so they more logically answer the questions that are most likely at the forefront of the reader's mind: 1) What is a disclosure? 2) How do I make a disclosure? 3) How will I be helped? 4) What does the university do (or, in this case, not do)?

~~remedies that are not available through a disclosure. In this process, the university will consider your wishes as far as possible, as provided for in these Procedures.~~

- vi. ~~The person who files the Complaint may~~ You may withdraw the complaint at any time. ~~Note, however, if you withdraw a complaint, the university may still proceed with an investigation. However, the withdrawal of a Complaint does not guarantee that the Complaint will not be investigated or that there will be no consequences to any individuals flowing from the Complaint.~~<sup>7</sup>

c. **Making a Report**

- i. A report is a notification to the RCMP ~~of that~~ sexual misconduct ~~that~~ has occurred that a person reasonably believes ~~raises to the level of criminal conduct. is a crime.~~<sup>8</sup>
- ii. ~~Individuals~~ The university strongly encourages anyone who experiences or witnesses sexual misconduct ~~that rises to the level of criminal conduct are strongly encouraged that they believe is a crime~~ to file a report.
- iii. ~~If a person advises~~ If you advise the university that ~~they you~~ intend to make a report, ~~the university will make available to them a support person on campus who can support them in making the report a support person on campus can help you with it.~~
- iv. The university will cooperate with any criminal investigation arising from a report, to the extent it is reasonable to do so and is permitted by law, ~~will cooperate with any criminal investigation arising from a Report.~~
- v. The university may be required to initiate an investigation and/or report of alleged sexual misconduct to the RCMP, ~~even without the consent of the individual who has experienced the sexual misconduct even without your consent~~ in certain cases:
  - a. if the allegation involves sexual misconduct involving a minor;
  - b. if the ~~applicable legislation law~~ requires the university ~~to carry out an investigation to investigate~~; or
  - c. if the university ~~has a reasonable belief that there exists~~ believes there is a risk to the health or safety of a member of the university community.

~~Should the~~ If the university initiates an investigation or informs the RCMP about alleged sexual misconduct without ~~the consent of the individual~~ your consent, the university will notify ~~that individual you~~ that it has done so.

7. **Comment [EDITOR25]:** This item edited to correct the overuse of negatives and simplify the statement.

8. **Comment [EDITOR26]:** Edited to be more direct and succinct. I also think you need to be cautious of wording that the misconduct might “rise to the level...” which could be read as judging the severity of how the misconduct impacted the survivor/person. I do understand the legal nuance, and that to be a crime, several tests must be met –but the point here is that a person may report the incident to the police –and the police will then determine if a crime has been committed.

## ~~Control over Process~~<sup>9</sup>

~~The university recognizes that individuals who have experienced Sexual Misconduct may wish to maintain control over whether and how their experience will be dealt with by the university. Which of the above option(s) the individual elects to pursue will impact on the level of that control.~~

## ~~Responding to~~ How the University Responds to ~~Disclosures~~<sup>10</sup>

~~Where an individual~~ When you make a disclosure of sexual misconduct to an employee of the university or support person on campus ~~that they have experienced Sexual Misconduct,~~ you can expect the employee or support person ~~should~~ to:

1. listen without judgment;
2. communicate that sexual misconduct is not ~~the fault of the person who has experienced it~~ your fault;
3. help ~~the individual to~~ you identify and/or access available ~~on or off campus services~~ services, on or off campus, such as emergency medical care or counselling;
4. ~~respect the individual's~~ respect your right to choose the services ~~they you~~ feel are most appropriate, ~~for them and the individual's right and to decide whether to make a complaint or a report~~;
5. recognize that disclosing sexual misconduct can be traumatic, and that ~~an individual's ability~~ your ability to recall the events may be limited or otherwise impacted;
6. respect ~~the individual's choice~~ your choice about how much ~~they you~~ disclose about ~~their your~~ experience; and
7. make every effort to respect your confidentiality and anonymity.

~~Employees of the University to whom a Disclosure is made~~ University employees who receive a disclosure or who otherwise become aware of sexual misconduct are required to notify the Student Services Director (~~the "Director"~~) and, where appropriate or university security. ~~The identities of the individuals involved in the Sexual Misconduct should only be disclosed where reasonably required for University purposes and/or for the purposes of protecting the health and safety of any individual. They will not disclose your identity (or the identity of anyone else involved) unless required for university purposes to protect the health and safety of any individual.~~

The Director and/or university security who receives the information will assess it and determine whether, ~~based on that information,~~ there is a risk to ~~the health or safety of anyone~~ anyone's health and safety. If so, ~~the Director and/or university security~~ they will take steps to protect ~~the health and safety of~~ those at risk. If not, ~~and unless otherwise required by law,~~ the university will not formally investigate a disclosure unless required by law.

~~Should a student, in making a Disclosure, request~~ If you ask for support or academic accommodation when you make a disclosure, ~~the student and the Director will meet to discuss the request.~~ the Director will meet with

9. **Comment [EDITOR27]:** This section was problematic structurally. I have incorporated the information into other sections of the document.

10. **Comment [EDITOR28]:** I have edited this section to keep the point of view to the reader –the victim –rather than to the person receiving the disclosure

you to discuss your request and work with you and any instructors, as needed, to meet your needs. ~~The Director will keep the information confidential as far as possible. Where there is a reasonable basis for the request, the Director will work together with the student and any instructors as appropriate, to ensure that the student receives all necessary reasonable support and/or academic accommodations, while maintaining confidentiality, to the extent that it is reasonably possible to do so.~~

#### ~~Responding to~~ How the University Responds to Complaints

##### *Ensuring Health and Safety*

When the Director receives a complaint, their first priority ~~will be~~ is to ensure the health and safety of those involved and of all members of the university community. ~~In order to do so~~ To do this, the Director may:

1. meet with ~~whomever they deem~~ anyone necessary to determine whether there is a threat to the health or safety of any member of the university;
2. take ~~action the Director deems appropriate~~ appropriate action to ensure the health and safety of any member of the university community; and
3. contact the RCMP.

~~In doing so~~, The Director will maintain the confidentiality of individuals involved ~~to the extent that it is reasonably possible to do so~~ as far as possible.

##### ~~Initial Complaint Review~~ Reviewing the Complaint

##### A complaint against a student<sup>11</sup>

If you make a formal complaint against another student, the Director will take the following steps:

1. ~~The Director will~~ Review the complaint to ensure it contains ~~sufficient detail necessary for the University to~~ enough detail to carry out an investigation.
2. ~~If there is not enough detail in the complaint, the Director will~~ Contact you and give you the opportunity to provide further details, if needed.
3. ~~If the Director determines that a complaint has enough detail, they will~~ Initiate an investigation if there is enough detail.
4. ~~When the Director receives a Complaint, prior to commencing an investigation, the Director will review the Complaint and ensure that it contains sufficient detail necessary for the university to carry out an investigation.~~

~~Where the Director determines there is insufficient detail in the Complaint, the Director will contact the individual who filed the Complaint, advise them of the deficiencies, and allow them the opportunity to provide further details in a timely manner.~~

~~Where the Director determines that a Complaint has sufficient detail necessary for the university to carry out an investigation, the Director will initiate the investigation process.~~

~~At any point prior to~~ At any time before or during an investigation, the university may take interim measures to address any concerns ~~it may have~~ about the well-being of any member of the university pending the

11. **Comment [EDITOR29]:** I have added sub-heads to this section to help orient the reader to the next steps

investigation, while minimizing the impact on other individuals involved and ~~recognizing the principle of the presumption of innocence.~~ upholding the principle that a person is presumed innocent<sup>12</sup> until found guilty.

~~When an Employee is Party to a Complaint~~ A complaint against an employee<sup>13</sup>

If you make a formal complaint against an employee, the university will investigate in one of the following ways:<sup>14</sup>

1. ~~Where a party to a Complaint~~ If the person you accuse of sexual misconduct is a union employee ~~whose employment is governed by a collective agreement,~~ the university will investigate following the procedures of the collective agreement.
2. ~~Where a party to a Complaint is an employee who is not subject to a collective agreement that requires the University to investigate such Complaints in accordance with procedures provided therein, the University will investigate the Complaint in accordance with the procedures provided for in the University's Respectful Workplace Policy. In such circumstances, at the commencement of the investigation, the University will provide the student involved in the Complaint with a copy of those procedures.~~ If the person you accuse of sexual misconduct is a non-union employee,<sup>15</sup> the university will investigate following the procedures in the university's Respectful Workplace Policy.

In both these cases, the university will provide you with a copy of the relevant procedures at the start of the investigation.

~~Investigation~~ Investigating the Complaint

~~Where~~ When the Director determines an investigation ~~is to proceed under these Procedures, the Director will assess the Complaint and, depending on their assessment of the Complaint, their relevant knowledge and expertise, and any other factors they deem appropriate, will:~~ should proceed, they will decide the next steps depending on their assessment of the complaint. They will either:

- a. carry out the investigation;
- b. delegate ~~another individual~~ someone else at the university ~~with~~ who has the necessary knowledge and expertise to carry out the investigation internally; or
- c. engage an external investigator to carry out the investigation.

The Director will advise ~~the parties to the Complaint~~ everyone involved in the complaint that an investigation is proceeding ~~under these Procedures, will advise them of the identity of the investigator, will notify them that the investigator will be in contact with them, and will offer both~~ and who the investigator will be. They will also

12. **Comment [EDITOR30]:** Simplify words and phrases where possible.

13. **Comment [EDITOR31]:** I've restructured and heavily edited this section. The original topic sentence referenced a student respondent, underneath the heading referring to employees, and the legalese language will be challenging to most readers

14. **Comment [EDITOR32]:** "Party to a complaint" (used in the original) is not helpful language. Besides being legalese, it is not clear, because both the person making the complaint and the person accused are a "party."

15. **Comment [EDITOR33]:** Changed to simply "non-union" for fewer words and clarity

notify those involved that the investigator will contact them, and offer the option of seeking support in relation to the complaint and/or investigation.

~~The investigator will carry out an investigation into the Complaint. The investigation process will be determined by the investigator and will take into account~~ The investigator will determine the investigation process, considering:

- a. the sensitive nature of ~~the Complaint as~~ a complaint of sexual misconduct; and
- b. the interests of all those involved. ~~in the Complaint;~~

~~while ensuring procedural fairness.~~<sup>16</sup>

The investigation process will include, but will not ~~necessarily~~ be limited to:

- a. allowing ~~the complainant the opportunity~~ you, as the person who made the complaint, an opportunity to participate in the investigation and to provide further information ~~as appropriate;~~
- b. notifying the ~~respondent~~ person accused<sup>17</sup> of the allegations against them; and
- c. providing the ~~respondent~~ person accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations.

Where requested by an investigator, all members of the university community are required to cooperate and fully participate in an investigation ~~pursuant to~~<sup>18</sup> ~~these Procedures. Failure to do so may lead to sanctions or discipline up to dismissal or expulsion. If they do not, they may be sanctioned or disciplined. This may include being dismissed or expelled.~~

#### After the Investigation

Once the investigation is complete, the investigator will write a report that will state whether the complaint has been proven.<sup>19</sup> ~~If the investigator is someone other than the Director, they will give the report to the Director. Where the investigator is not the Director, upon completion of the investigation, the investigator will provide the Director an investigation report which will include a determination of whether or not the Complaint is substantiated.~~

~~Following completion of the investigation,~~ The Director will notify ~~the parties to the Complaint~~ those involved of whether ~~or not~~ the complaint was found to be substantiated.

~~Where~~ If the complaint is not substantiated, ~~the respondent to the Complaint will not be subject to sanctions~~

16. **Comment [EDITOR34]:** Removed this phrase because without a clear definition it is not helpful.

Also, the entire process implies “procedural fairness,” so I don’t think you need it.

17. **Comment [EDITOR35]:** I have changed language here because you do not define “respondent,” which not every reader will understand

18. **Comment [EDITOR36]:** “Pursuant to” is legalese (and the phrase isn’t needed in this sentence for the meaning).

19. **Comment [EDITOR37]:** I have changed “substantiated” here to “proven,” acknowledging that there is a slight difference in meaning. Please review and okay, if possible (in which case other references to “substantiated” can also be changed). If it can’t be changed, can “substantiated” be briefly defined? What does it take to be “substantiated”?

~~or discipline for the alleged conduct complained of in the Complaint.~~ the person accused will not have any sanctions or discipline imposed.

~~Where a~~ **If the complaint is substantiated**, the university will ~~take steps it determines appropriate to address the substantiated Complaint~~ determine appropriate action, which may include:

- a. steps ~~towards ensuring~~ to ensure the health, safety and well-being of the individual who ~~was subject to experienced~~ the sexual misconduct ~~which, where appropriate,~~ This may include but not limited to:
  - i. academic accommodations (e.g., extension on an assignment);
  - ii. transfer or movement, removal from classes, or restrictions on the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct; and/or
  - iii. other steps to eliminate or limit contact between ~~the complainant~~ the person who made the complaint and the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct.;
- b. where the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct is a student or employee of the university, discipline, up to being dismissed or expelled;
- c. where the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct is not a student or employee of the university but ~~has a connection to the university~~ is connected in some way (i.e. e.g., contractors a contractor, suppliers, volunteer, visitor ~~who attend~~ on campus), sanctions or any other action the university deems appropriate ~~to address the substantiated Complaint~~; and
- d. any other remedies the university determines as appropriate.



# Version 3: Final Document

Version 3 is the result of all comments and changes. It also incorporates any answers to questions that were sent to the post-secondary institution throughout the revision process.

**BEST PRACTICE:** Compare the finished version to the original, how has it improved? Is there anything more you can do to help the reader?

## *Plain Language Tip*

To write effectively:

- Put the most important information first
- Use headings to help your reader find important information
- Write the way you speak
- Address your readers directly

The document for this chapter is provided in two ways:

1. As a PDF that can be downloaded: Student Sexual Misconduct Procedures: Version 3 (Final) [PDF]  
(<https://opentextbc.ca/plbpsvpp/wp-content/uploads/sites/346/2021/05/Version3.pdf>)
2. Directly in this resource in the following textbox.

## STUDENT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT PROCEDURES

### Definitions

Terms used in these procedures are as defined in the policy.

### Scope

These procedures explain the steps you can take to notify the university of an incident of sexual misconduct. They also explain the process the university will follow in cases of sexual misconduct.

### How to Notify the University of Sexual Misconduct: Three Options

If you have experienced or witnessed sexual misconduct, or you know sexual misconduct has occurred or may occur, you have three options to notify the university:

1. Making a disclosure
2. Making a formal complaint
3. Reporting to the police

You can choose one, two, or all three of these options. For example, you may decide you want to make a disclosure, and then later elevate the notification to a formal complaint.

The university recognizes that individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct may wish to maintain control over whether and how the university will deal with their experience. The choice you make on how to notify the university will affect your level of control.

#### a. **Making a Disclosure**

- i. A disclosure is an informal notification to the university that sexual misconduct has occurred or that there is reason to believe it may occur.
- ii. You can make a disclosure to any employee of the university or support person on campus (e.g., counsellor, nurse practitioner, doctor, manager, residence advisor, security, student union).
- iii. By making a disclosure that you have experienced sexual misconduct, you may obtain supports (e.g., medical assistance, counselling) and where appropriate, reasonable academic accommodations.
- iv. The university will not formally investigate a disclosure unless the university believes there is an imminent risk of harm to someone or there is a legal requirement to do so. That means you will not have access to certain remedies and no one will be disciplined for what happened. If you want the university to investigate the sexual misconduct, you need to make formal complaint or a report to the police (see below).

#### b. **Making a Complaint**

- i. A complaint is a formal notification to the university of sexual misconduct, made by the person who experiences the sexual misconduct.
- ii. If you are considering filing a complaint, you may consult a counsellor or wellness coach who can answer questions and help you with the process.
- iii. It is helpful to file a complaint as soon as possible after the incident of sexual misconduct. A delay in filing a complaint could affect the investigation and the outcome. However, the university recognizes that individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct may need some time before they are prepared to file a complaint.
- iv. Your complaint must be submitted in writing to the Student Services Director. It must contain sufficient information of the allegations of sexual misconduct to allow the university to conduct an investigation. This includes:
  - 1. the date, time, and location of the alleged sexual misconduct;
  - 2. the names, and if available, contact information, of any individuals involved; and
  - 3. the names, and if available, contact information, of any witnesses.
- v. When the university receives the complaint, it will begin a formal investigation. If the complaint is substantiated, you will have access to remedies that are not available through a disclosure. In this process, the university will consider your wishes as far as possible.
- vi. You may withdraw the complaint at any time. Note, however, if you withdraw a complaint, the university may still proceed with an investigation.

#### **c. Making a Report**

- i. A report is a notification to the RCMP that sexual misconduct has occurred that a person believes is a crime.
- ii. The university strongly encourages anyone who experiences or witnesses sexual misconduct that they believe is a crime to file a report.
- iii. If you advise the university that you intend to make a report, a support person on campus can help you with it.
- iv. The university will cooperate with any criminal investigation arising from a report to the extent it is reasonable to do so and is permitted by law.
- v. The university may be required to initiate an investigation and/or report of alleged sexual misconduct to the RCMP without your consent in certain cases:
  - a. if the allegation involves sexual misconduct involving a minor;
  - b. if the law requires the university to investigate; or
  - c. if the university believes there is a risk to the health or safety of a member of the university community.

If the university initiates an investigation or informs the RCMP about alleged sexual misconduct without your consent, the university will notify you that it has done so.

#### **How the University Responds to Disclosures**

When you make a disclosure of sexual misconduct to an employee of the university or support person on campus, you can expect the employee or support person to:

- a. listen without judgment;
- b. communicate that sexual misconduct is not your fault;
- c. help you identify and/or access available services on or off campus, such as emergency medical care or counselling;
- d. respect your right to choose the services you feel are most appropriate, and to decide whether to make a complaint or a report;
- e. recognize that disclosing sexual misconduct can be traumatic, and that your ability to recall the events may be limited or otherwise impacted;
- f. respect your choice about how much you disclose about your experience; and
- g. make every effort to respect your confidentiality and anonymity.

University employees who receive a disclosure or who otherwise become aware of sexual misconduct are required to notify the Student Services Director or university security. They will not disclose your identity (or the identity of anyone else involved) unless required for university purposes or to protect the health and safety of any individual.

The Director and/or university security who receives the information will assess it and determine whether there is a risk to anyone's health or safety. If so, they will take steps to protect those at risk. If not, the university will not formally investigate a disclosure unless required by law.

If you ask for support or academic accommodation when you make a disclosure, the Director will meet with you to discuss your request and work with you and any instructors, as needed, to meet your needs. The Director will keep the information confidential as far as possible.

### **How the University Responds to Complaints**

#### *Ensuring Health and Safety*

When the Director receives a complaint, their first priority is to ensure the health and safety of those involved and of all members of the university community. To do this, the Director may:

- a. meet with anyone necessary to determine whether there is a threat to the health or safety of any member of the university;
- b. take appropriate action to ensure the health and safety of any member of the university community; and
- c. contact the RCMP.

The Director will maintain the confidentiality of individuals involved as far as possible.

#### *Reviewing the Complaint*

##### **A complaint against a student**

If you make a formal complaint against another student, the Director will take the following steps:

1. Review the complaint to ensure it contains enough detail to carry out an investigation.
2. Contact you and give you the opportunity to provide further details.
3. Initiate an investigation if there is enough detail.

At any time before or during an investigation, the university may take interim measures to address any concerns about the well-being of any member of the university, while minimizing the impact on other individuals involved and upholding the principle that a person is presumed innocent until found guilty.

#### A complaint against an employee

If you make a formal complaint against an employee, the university will investigate in one of the following ways:

1. If the person you accuse of sexual misconduct is a union employee, the university will investigate following the procedures of the collective agreement.
2. If the person you accuse of sexual misconduct is a non-union employee, the university will investigate following the procedures in the university's Respectful Workplace Policy.

In both these cases, the university will provide you with a copy of the relevant procedures at the start of the investigation

#### *Investigating the Complaint*

When the Director determines an investigation should proceed, they will decide the next steps depending on their assessment of the complaint. They will either:

- a. carry out the investigation;
- b. delegate someone else at the university who has the knowledge and expertise to carry out the investigation internally; or
- c. engage an external investigator to carry out the investigation.

The Director will advise everyone involved in the complaint that an investigation is proceeding and who the investigator will be. They will also notify those involved that the investigator will contact them, and offer the option of seeking support in relation to the complaint and/or investigation.

The investigator will determine the investigation process, considering:

- a. the sensitive nature of a complaint of sexual misconduct; and
- b. the interests of all those involved.

The investigation process will include, but will not be limited to:

- a. allowing you, as the person who made the complaint, an opportunity to participate in the investigation and to provide further information;
- b. notifying the person accused of the allegations against them; and
- c. providing the person accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations.

Where requested by an investigator, all members of the university community are required to cooperate and fully participate in an investigation. If they do not, they may be sanctioned or disciplined. This may include being dismissed or expelled.

#### *After the Investigation*

Once the investigation is complete, the investigator will write a report that will state whether the complaint has been proven. If the investigator is someone other than the Director, they will give the report to the Director.

The Director will notify those involved whether the complaint was found to be substantiated.

**If the complaint is not substantiated**, the person accused will not have any sanctions or discipline imposed.

**If the complaint is substantiated**, the university will determine appropriate actions, which may include:

- a. steps to ensure the health, safety and well-being of the individual who experienced the sexual misconduct. This may include but not limited to:
  - i. academic accommodations (e.g., extension on an assignment);
  - ii. transfer or removal from classes, or restrictions on the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct; and/or
  - iii. other steps to eliminate or limit contact between the person who made the complaint and the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct.
- b. where the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct is a student or employee of the university, discipline, up to being dismissed or expelled;
- c. where the individual who carried out the sexual misconduct is not a student or employee of the university but is connected in some way (e.g., a contractor, volunteer, visitor on campus), sanctions or any other action the university deems appropriate; and
- d. any other remedies the university determines as appropriate.

# DOING THE WORK

When reviewing a document for plain language, it's helpful to follow a checklist to guide your work. You can use the one in the next section; others are available from the resources provided in the Other Resources section.



# A Plain Language Checklist

## A Plain Language Checklist

1. Identify your audience
2. Define your purpose
3. Determine the best way to organize your document for your audience
4. Establish the appropriate tone for your audience
5. Avoid long sentences and paragraphs
6. Use simple, straightforward words
7. Use lists
8. Explain technical terms
9. Consider the design (type size, use of white space, helpful graphics)
10. Test the document (use readability tests and ask readers to review it)



# A Note on Readability Tests

A readability test uses a mathematical formula to measure reading ease. It is just one tool to evaluate writing, and it needs to be used along with all the other plain language tactics illustrated in the model document.

The chart below shows the improvement in the final version of the model document compared to the original.

Document version	Number of words	Flesch-Kincaid reading level	Readability grade (Readable.com)
Original	2,365	16	D
Final	1,815	13	C

The final document is 23% shorter than the original, which by itself aids readability significantly. The other scores show that the document could be made more plain by using fewer technical terms, introducing more active voice, and editing even harder. Keep in mind, however, that readers are influenced by what they bring to the document: prior knowledge, education level, and motivation. What is plain to one audience may not be plain to another.

As well, as noted in the Introduction, plain language considerations must be balanced against the requirements of all stakeholders, which makes revising policy and procedures particularly challenging.

Readability tests are best used to measure improvement from version to version and to give you the opportunity to consider further what improvement may be appropriate for your document and your readers. Use readability tests in your work to reinforce your practice.

## Plain Language Tip

*Get to the point as directly as you can; never use a big word if a little one will do.*

— Emily Carr



# Other Resources

Here are a few helpful resources to learn more about applying plain language principles to your documents. A simple Google search for plain language resources will unveil several other helpful publications and websites.

## Plain Language Resources

- Plain Language Audit Tool [PDF] ([https://www.nwtliteracy.ca/sites/default/files/resources/136648a\\_nwt\\_literacy\\_audit\\_tool.pdf](https://www.nwtliteracy.ca/sites/default/files/resources/136648a_nwt_literacy_audit_tool.pdf)) (Northwest Territories Literacy Council, 2015): An excellent resource to help you review your documents using plain language guidelines and readability tests.
- The Language Portal of Canada (<https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/index>) (Government of Canada): The portal contains several resources. Look up terms, find other plain language resources, read blogs, and take quizzes.
- Plain Language Guide (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/policies-procedures/web-content-development-guides/writing-for-the-web/plain-language-guide>) (Government of British Columbia): Developed for anyone who writes digital or print content for B.C. government programs, services, or resources.

## Online Readability Tests

- Readable (<https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>)
- Readability Formulas (<https://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>)

*Plain Language Tip*

Be the reader!



# Acknowledgements

We acknowledge with respect the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) nations and the Ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) speaking peoples from the Songhees and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations, and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples on whose lands the *Plain Language Best Practices: Sexualized Violence Policies and Procedures* was created.

This plain language resource was a collaboration between BCcampus, West Coast Editorial Associates, and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training.

We acknowledge BCcampus and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training for funding and managing this project.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the readers of this plain language resource, who are bravely taking steps to create, evaluate, and improve their sexualized violence and misconduct policies and procedures for the safety of all students, staff, and faculty in the B.C. post-secondary sector.



Ministry of  
Advanced Education  
and Skills Training





# Versioning History

This page provides a record of edits and changes made to this book since its initial publication. Whenever edits or updates are made in the text, we provide a record and description of those changes here. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.01. If the edits involve substantial updates, the version number increases to the next full number.

The files posted by this book always reflect the most recent version. If you find an error in this book, please fill out the Report an Error (<https://open.bccampus.ca/browse-our-collection/reporting-an-error/>) form.

Version	Date	Change	Details
1.01	May 3, 2021	Book published	