

10 Tips for Effective Policy Writing

These policy writing tips can help bring clarity and greater understanding to your body-worn camera (BWC) policy without changing any of its substance.

1. Use consistent terms throughout the policy.

Avoid

Alternating between member, officer, and employee.

Avoid

Alternating between BWC, device, equipment, camera, video recording device and similar variations of the term “body-worn camera.”

Use

One term for your sworn personnel and stick with it *throughout the policy*. Make it clear when you are referring to sworn personnel as opposed to any other department employee.

Use

BWC for body-worn camera and stick with it *throughout the policy*.

2. Once you abbreviate something, use the abbreviation consistently going forward.

Use

The New York Police Department (NYPD) policy is to equip all NYPD officers with body-worn cameras (BWCs). Officers will receive 8 hours of BWC training.

3. Omit surplus words. If two words mean the same thing, use the shorter, simpler word. Sounding like a lawyer is NOT a good thing.

Avoid

for the purpose of
in the event that
in accordance with
in connection with
utilize
in order to

Use

to
if
by, under
with, about, concerning
use
to

in relation to
prior to
subsequent to
said
thirty (30) seconds

about, concerning
before
after
the, this, those
30 seconds

4. Use apostrophes to eliminate unnecessary words.

Avoid

The BWC belonging to the officer
The policy of the Department

Use

The officer's BWC
The Department's policy

5. Use "shall/will," "should," or "may" to express the level of discretion given to BWC users.¹
6. Avoid "etc." Take the time to figure out what the terms have in common and use that instead.

Avoid

Officers should not activate their BWCs in restrooms, locker rooms, hospitals, etc.

Use

Officers should not activate their BWCs in restrooms, locker rooms, hospitals, or other places where individuals have a heightened expectation of personal privacy.

7. Use the active voice.

¹ In policy language, these words are used to express different levels of obligation, requirement, or expectation. The exact meaning of each word can vary depending on the context and the jurisdiction, but generally speaking:

- "Shall" or "will" is often used to indicate a mandatory obligation or requirement. For example, "Assigned personnel shall activate the BWC to record all contacts with citizens in the performance of official duties."
- "Should" is often used to indicate a recommendation or expectation that is not as strong as a mandate. For example, "If BWC recording is interrupted or terminated prior to the end of the incident, the deputy should narrate the reason for terminating the recording prior to deactivating the BWC."
- "Must" is often used to indicate a mandatory obligation or requirement that is considered more binding than "shall." For example, "Every police officer must receive training on the proper care and maintenance of BWCs at least annually."

Avoid

The BWC shall be activated by the officer when...

Use

The officer shall activate the BWC when..

8. Comprehension is key. Short sentences aid comprehension. Turn long sentences into multiple shorter ones. Rule of thumb: if a sentence runs four or more lines, find a place or two to stick in a period.
9. When drafting a list to break up a long sentence, make sure items in the list match its introductory language. Each item's substance and grammar must be consistent. Make sure that the items listed together are relevant and logically linked to each other. Each item in the list should be lower case, and it should end with a period.

Avoid

Officers shall activate the BWC before all enforcement actions, including:

- a. Arresting;
- b. Traffic stops;
- c. Well-being checks;
- d. Chasing suspects

Use

Officers shall activate the BWC before all enforcement actions, including:

- a. arrests.
 - b. traffic stops.
 - c. street encounters.
 - d. foot pursuits.
10. Proofread, proofread, proofread. Consider having others who did not write any of the policy review it as part of the proofreading process.