Tips for Clear Writing from the Policy Office

1. Keep sentences **short and simple**. Don’t confuse your message with unnecessary words. Clarity is kindness…it’s also safer.
   - *Instead of:* The purpose of this policy is to provide NSHA Health Team members with direction on the provision of thanksgiving dinner.
   - *Try:* This policy provides direction on the provision of Thanksgiving dinner.

2. **Use shorter words.** Get rid of words with ‘-ize’ and ‘ization’.
   - *Instead of* utilize, *try* use

3. **Read your work out loud.** If you’re tripping over your sentences, or they sound clunky to your ear, it’s a good signal that your reader will have trouble with the same passages. Clean them up.

4. Use the **Active voice.** Start procedures with action words.
   - Passive: The Authorized Prescriber must be contacted immediately.
   - Active: Contact the Authorized Prescriber immediately.

5. Be **consistent with terms.** If ‘physician’ and ‘doctor’ and ‘authorized prescriber’ are used in the same document to refer to the same person, you may confuse the reader. Choose one term, define it if necessary, and use it throughout the policy.

6. **Be direct.** Speak directly to the reader (I’m doing it right now).

7. If there is a chance a word choice may lead to miscommunication, pick a different word.
   - Bi-Annual, Semi-Annual? Try “twice a year.”

8. Write in the present tense and use a positive tone if possible.
   - The office will not be open on Fridays.
   - The office is closed on Fridays.

9. **Aim for a grade 6 reading level.** It is harder to convey a complex thought simply with clear writing, than to complicate a simple idea with bad writing.

10. You “must” use “must” if you are demanding an obligation.
    - Shall: antiquated, could be confused with future action
    - Will: predicts future action
    - Should: infers obligation, but not absolute necessity
    - May: indicates discretion to act
Constructing a Policy Statement

An effectively written policy statement either:

- Communicates a decision, or
- Compels (or prohibits) an action.

For example:

- NSHA provides Team Members with donuts on rainy days. (*Communicates a decision.*)
- NSHA Team Members must wear pink on Wednesdays. (*Compels an action.*)

A policy statement should be clear, straightforward, and focused on the rule, or the what. How to follow the rule is the work of the procedure section, and why the rule exists should be found in the guiding principles and values section.