



**NEED TO KNOW**

# BEST PRACTICES FOR GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES AT SCHOOL/COLLEGE-LEVEL

In this document, you will find the Graduate School's guidance on creating a clear grievance procedure as well as resources and templates to support you in doing so.

## **GUIDANCE ON CREATING A CLEAR GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

Guidance on creating a clear grievance procedure:

### **1. Structure & Clarity**

- Use plain, accessible language in policy documents; avoid excessive legal or procedural jargon.
- Define clearly what qualifies as an academic grievance versus issues handled under other policies (grade disputes, discrimination, conduct violations).

Clearly distinguish informal resolution from formal grievance processes.

### **2. Accessibility & Transparency**

- Post procedures publicly on student-facing websites (current student section, academic policies, or advising portal).
- Include procedures in student handbooks, orientation materials, and advising communications.
- Provide direct points of contact (names, titles, or functional roles—e.g., "Associate Dean for Academic Affairs," "Graduate Program Coordinator") so students know where to start.
- Ensure consistency in how the procedure is applied across programs within the school/college.

### **3. Informal Resolution (Conciliation Stage)**

- Encourage students to first address concerns informally with the faculty/staff involved when possible.
- Identify designated conciliators (e.g., department chairs, associate deans, or ombudspersons) to help mediate disputes.
- Offer the UW Office of the Ombud as a neutral resource.
- [This intro to the ombuds document](#) can be shared as a resource for students
- Establish timelines for initiating informal conciliation (commonly within 3 months of the issue).

CONTINUED >

## 4. Formal Grievance Process

- **Step-by-step guidance:**
  - How to submit (e.g., written complaint with date, policy cited, relief requested).
  - Required documentation.
  - Submission timeline (e.g., within X days after informal stage concludes).
- **Committee Structure for Hearings:**
  - Use faculty and student representation.
  - Provide students and faculty the right to challenge committee members for potential bias or conflict.
  - Provide committee members with clear instructions on their roles and responsibilities.
- **Hearings:**
  - Ensure confidentiality but allow students to bring a support person.
  - Maintain distinction: this is an academic review procedure, not a legal trial. Attorneys may be present but in advisory roles only.
- **Written decision:** Formal resolution should be documented, with clear communication to all parties.

## 5. Timelines & Efficiency

- **Publish clear deadlines for each stage:**
  - Informal conciliation initiation (within 3 months of incident).
  - Formal complaint filing (within 10–15 business days after informal stage ends).
  - Hearings and decision timelines (e.g., hearing within 20 days, decision within 10 business days).
- Encourage “reasonable dispatch” but stress fairness and due process over speed.

## 6. Appeals Under Policy 3.8 (2025+)

- Students may appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School only after engaging with the local grievance process by the student’s school, college or campus. The Graduate School Dean will review the appeal request based only on procedural uniformity grounds (i.e., inconsistency or irregularity in the unit’s own process, or with EO 58).
- Ensure your procedure includes language noting this appeal endpoint and scope.

## 7. Documentation & Recordkeeping

- Maintain written summaries and any hearing notes/audio recording securely, in compliance with UW records retention schedules.
- Document not only final decisions but also attempts at informal resolution.
- Communicate outcomes in writing to all relevant parties.

## 8. Student Support & Equity

- **Provide information about available resources:**
  - UW Ombud (independent support for navigating conflicts).
  - Graduate Program Advisors and Graduate Program Coordinators.
  - Disability Resources for Students on your campus for accommodation requests.
- **Embed a confidentiality statement:** ensure students know their concerns will be addressed respectfully and with privacy.
- Reaffirm UW’s anti-retaliation protections.

CONTINUED >

## RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS, COLLEGES & CAMPUSES

### 1. Sample UW Grievance Procedures

- **College of Engineering**: Clear policy tied to student feedback and complaint resolution, simple navigation.
- **College of the Environment**: Strong examples of definitions, timelines, and committee processes.
- **School of Law**: Well-structured, concise, with stress on accessibility and fairness.

### 2. Policy References

- **UW Graduate School Policy 3.8** (2025 revision).
- **Executive Order 58** (Student Academic Grievances).
- **UW Administrative Policy Statement 46.3** (Discrimination Complaints).
- **UW Student Conduct Code** (WAC 478-120, Chapter 209).

### 3. Support Offices

- **UW Office of the Ombud**: informal conflict navigation.
- UW Disability Resources for Students (DRS) at **Bothell**, **Seattle** and **Tacoma**. accommodations in grievance processes.
- **UW Graduate School**

#### ACADEMIC GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE > CHECKLIST

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Define</b> what constitutes an academic grievance               | <input type="radio"/> <b>Specify</b> timelines for each stage of the process           |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Provide</b> informal resolution options before formal grievance | <input type="radio"/> <b>Identify</b> personnel roles and responsibilities             |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Designate</b> clear points of contact for students              | <input type="radio"/> <b>Include</b> documentation and recordkeeping requirements      |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Publish</b> procedures clearly on your website                  | <input type="radio"/> <b>Ensure</b> confidentiality provisions                         |
| <input type="radio"/> <b>Include</b> a step-by-step formal grievance process             | <input type="radio"/> <b>Outline</b> appeal process to the Dean of the Graduate School |