

How to Write an Employee Handbook

Many businesses have problems with how to write an employee handbook. However, creating an employee handbook is easier than you think. The main thing is to know what to include in it.

An employee handbook with specific policies and procedures will eliminate confusion about what a business should expect from its employees and what employees should expect from their employer. Before creating an employee handbook, a business should make sure it decides on the policies and procedures it wants to include beforehand and express them in a simple, direct, and unambiguous manner. Each employee should receive a copy of the handbook at the beginning of employment.

If a business is wondering how to write an employee handbook, it should use the following list of policies, procedures, and explanations as a guide:

Introduction

- Welcome the employee.
- Provide a history of the company, but keep it brief.
- Explain the company's goals, values, beliefs, and philosophy. (This helps make the employee feel like he or she is part of something big or special.)

Employee Acknowledgment Form

- The employee should know it is his/her responsibility to read and understand the employee handbook.
- The acknowledgment should be located at the beginning of handbook.
- Provide an awareness of the importance of handbook, because it will ensure employees will actually read it. This helps avoid future claims by the employee that he or she did not know about the handbook.
- Include a disclaimer that the employee handbook is not an employment contract between the employee and the company.

Equal Employment Opportunity Statement

- Provide an outline of a company's policy regarding equal employment opportunity. This is a critical component and should always be included. No equal employment opportunity statement will ever send the wrong message.
- Include a reference to affirmative action policy here (if the business has one).

General Policies

- Attendance: provide a general statement about tardiness and the business's expectations and procedure for requests for time off.

- Confidentiality: include policy regarding protection against the disclosure of confidential business information. The information considered confidential should be described with specificity.
- Covenants Not To Compete: provide a reference to any restrictive covenants, but make sure the law of the applicable state allows such covenants. (For example, Massachusetts is fairly pro-business, but New Hampshire has taken a turn toward limiting covenants.)
- Data Privacy: describe the company's policy for protection of personal information (a requirement now in most states). Refer to a written comprehensive information security program (also required in most states).
- Dress Code: Describe requirements regarding clothing, uniforms, etc.
- Employment Categories: Outline the varieties of employment categories (full-time vs. part-time) and provide a disclaimer (if applicable) that employees are at-will employees and, thus, may be dismissed at any time at the company's discretion. Any job descriptions, however, should be set forth in separate documentation.
- Parking: identify any applicable policy or procedure for parking.
- Performance Reviews: These are essential if problems ever arise with employee. There is no need for a description of the process, but it should address when reviews occur (every six months, annually, etc.).
- Safety & Accidents: refer to relevant documents (safety posters, emergency procedures, etc.) and periodic employee training regarding safety.
- Smoking: provide or refer to the applicable laws and building rules regarding smoking.
- Social Media: outline expectations regarding employee behavior on blogs, message boards, Facebook, Twitter, etc. All content posted on websites should be subject to company policies.
- Substance Abuse: Outline the company's substance abuse-related policy, requirements for testing, and disciplinary process.
- Use of Employer or Company Property: Describe that reasonable use of company telephones and computers is allowed so long as there is no interference with business. There should be no unauthorized use of the Internet.
- Work schedules (if applicable): Define procedures for and information regarding work schedules.
- Additional Policies: outline other applicable policies, including employment verification requests from outside sources, breaks, job posting program, adverse weather instructions, solicitation guidelines, and whistle blower protection.

Compensation & Benefits

- Payroll: outline payroll processing options (e.g., direct deposit) and pay periods (weekly, bi-weekly, number of pay periods).
- Work Hours & Reporting: define the work day and information regarding overtime.
- Vacation & Personal Days: define who is eligible, the rate at which vacation accrues, any applicable carry-over policy, requirements for requesting vacation and personal days, and unused vacation if the employee leaves company.
- Holidays: list the days the company recognizes as holidays, and define how employees are paid for holidays.

- Health Insurance: provide a brief overview of coverage and who is eligible, but refer to separate documentation with more detail.
- COBRA: refer to continuation of health benefits, but, again, refer to a fuller, more detailed explanation in documentation provided to the employee upon leaving the company.
- Military Service: define who is eligible, and outline the policy and requirements.
- Short-Term Disability: define the policy and who is eligible.
- Worker's Compensation: identify whether the company has worker's compensation insurance, and, again, refer to separate documentation.
- Retirement Plans: provide a brief description of the company's plan, and refer to more detailed plan documents.
- Employee Assistance: provide a brief description of the company's program and any applicable telephone numbers.
- Other Benefits: outline other applicable compensation and/or benefits, including information about credit unions, tuition assistance, employee referral programs, idea incentives, service awards, employee purchases of company goods/services, and annual physical exams and blood screening.

Discrimination & Harassment

- Discrimination and Sexual Harassment: describe the policy against discrimination and harassment, and outline the procedures for the company's response to such complaints. This is another essential component of an employee handbook. If a business ever wonders how to write an employee handbook, this area is an excellent place to start.

Leaves of Absence

- Family and Medical Leave Act (if applicable): this applies to businesses with 50 or more employees. Explain and address the benefits and requirements under FMLA and state laws.
- Maternity Leave: identify who is eligible and the amount of time allowed and the rate of pay provided during absence.
- Sick Leave: outline the company's policy but ensure that it is consistent with vacation, the company's FMLA, maternity leave, and short-term disability policies. There are no legal requirements for sick leave, but three to 10 days of paid sick leave per year is common.
- Jury Duty: this is a good idea to include. Identify the relationship between the rate of pay and court compensation and any applicable requirement of proof of service.
- Funeral Leave: identify the type of family member (immediate or extended family) for which whose death leave is allowed and the amount of time allowed.

If a business ends up ultimately creating an employee handbook itself, it should make sure it has an attorney review it so that it is consistent with federal, state, and local laws.

Employee handbooks are very helpful because they communicate a company's expectations to an employee and helps it run its businesses predictably and consistently. They also remove any

worries or confusion regarding policies, procedures, and benefits and, instead, help focus employees on performance and production.

How to write an employee handbook is less complicated than one might expect, and it will be rewarding for both the business and the employee.