



# Effective policy management and compliance best practices

Practical tips for streamlining document control and version management with SharePoint

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Policy management and compliance can feel overwhelming, but making small changes can make a big difference, especially when using SharePoint (or other document repositories) to store important company documents.

The following tips will help you streamline your policy management processes, whether or not you're ready for a dedicated policy management system like Xoralia.

Based on our experience in guiding clients to establish robust policy management processes, we have outlined the following key practices to enhance document management. We hope you find this guide both useful and practical.



### Keep document titles simple

When naming documents, keep titles straightforward. Avoid including unnecessary information like control codes, department details, publishing dates, or expiry dates. If you use SharePoint, exclude version numbers or control references from the title as well. SharePoint's powerful version history and metadata columns are designed to manage that information for you.



### Version control

Consistency is key to effective version control. We recommend using a simple approach that distinguishes between minor and major versions:

- During the document creation phase, start with version 0.1.
- When the document is sent for peer review or feedback, update it to version 0.2, marking it as a minor version.
- Even without dedicated policy management software, tools like SharePoint allow multiple users to edit documents simultaneously, reducing errors and saving time compared to emailing local copies.

- Once the document is fully reviewed and ready for approval, label it as version 0.3. Upon approval, it becomes version 1.0, indicating the first major, approved version. Any subsequent changes revert to minor versions (e.g., 0.4) until they require a new major release.
- Major versions are the only ones that should be distributed for reading, consumption, and attestation. When a document expires and needs revalidation, the next draft starts at version 1.1, continuing the cycle.



### Block editing of live documents

To maintain the integrity of your documents, ensure that live documents available to end users are not edited “on-the-fly.”

Any changes, even minor ones like fixing typos, should go through the proper review and approval process. Track these minor changes using version control (e.g., version 1.3).

Set system permissions to prevent unauthorized edits; no one, not even super-users, should be able to alter live (published) documents. Keep drafts in a separate, designated draft library to avoid confusion.



### Set expiry dates for documents

Every document should have its publishing date recorded in a version control table, but it's just as crucial to set expiry dates to ensure regular reviews. Even if a document doesn't require updates, its revalidation should be noted.

The review intervals depend on your organization's industry and compliance requirements. For example, an Information Security policy may need an annual review. As a general rule, we suggest setting a maximum expiry interval of three years, as much can change within that period. Tools like Xoralia can help monitor documents and send reminders for upcoming expiry dates.



### Block downloads of documents

To maintain version control and prevent the use of outdated documents, restrict users from downloading or printing them. This approach ensures that everyone uses the latest versions of policies and procedures. In SharePoint, you can configure document library permissions to enforce this rule.

If you do enable printing then make sure the document header or footer contains version information including date published, expiry date and version number.



### Implement static “document control” references

Assign each document a static reference number that never changes. Use a consistent format, such as prefixing the reference with the department and document type, followed by a unique number (e.g., ‘HR-POL-001’ for a Human Resources policy or ‘HR-PRO-001’ for a procedure).

For auditing purposes, maintain a document matrix to track all documents and their reference numbers. Ensure that this matrix is accessible to all policy managers for easy reference.



## Do not delete policies

Even outdated or obsolete documents should be archived rather than deleted. Set up an 'Archive' library to keep the live document library clean and organized. Better still, enable version history in your SharePoint document library settings. This will keep a history automatically for you. Archived documents can serve as references for audits or historical records if needed.



## Policy format templates

While the content of a policy is most important, using a standardized format can significantly enhance readability.

Each policy document should have a clear, logical structure:

- The first page should include your organization's name, the policy title, a brief overview, the document version, and the publishing date.
- Subsequent pages should contain a version control table, a contents page with headings and page numbers, followed by the main policy text.
- Appendices, if any, should be provided in a separate document to keep the main policy concise.



## Version control table

Include a version control table at the beginning of every document. This table should show the current version, the date it was updated, the person responsible for the changes, and a brief description of why the changes were made. This practice ensures everyone is reading the latest version and maintains compliance.



## Take control of your policy management today

Managing policies can be a time-consuming and complex task, but it doesn't have to be. Xoralia automates every aspect of policy management, removing the headaches of manual processes, missed deadlines, and version confusion. With Xoralia, you can ensure compliance, reduce human error, and free up time to focus on what really matters.

If you're ready to eliminate the pains of policy management, contact us today to discover how Xoralia can transform the way you manage your policies with ease and efficiency.

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Xoralia, our policy management solution, is the result of years of knowledge and insights gained from helping clients manage communications, key information, and processes effectively. When you choose Xoralia, you receive implementation and technical support from the very team that created it, ensuring a solution that is easy to use, innovative, and technically sound. Our grand ambition is to make Xoralia the leading management system for controlled documents and mission-critical content.