

Requesting Relief – The Basics

Note: This guide was produced by the Office of the Ombudsperson. It is not an official university document and is not intended to replace university policy published in the academic calendar and University Senate web site which are listed on the final page of this guide. This guide contains general advice only.

What is a Request for Relief?

A request for relief is a request that a decision maker at a higher-level review and potentially change a decision made by someone at a lower level.

Before launching a request for relief, be sure you know:

- ☐ The policy under which the decision was made
- ☐ Whether there is an established request for relief procedure under the policy
- ☐ The deadline for initiating a request for relief
- ☐ The reason behind the decision
- ☐ Who has the power to overturn or modify the decision

The rules and process of requesting relief are governed by policy. Normally the request for relief process within a policy will dictate the acceptable reasons for requesting relief, the formal (and informal, where applicable) levels of requesting relief, deadline(s) for filing an request of relief of a decision, and any restrictions on decision making.

For example: Jill, an undergraduate student in Social Science, cheats on her final examination in Calculus 1000a.

The decision, which falls under the Undergraduate Scholastic Offences policy, is made by the Undergraduate Chair in Mathematics.

According to the policy, Jill can request for relief of the finding *or* the outcome to the Associate Dean in the Faculty of Science.

Why should I request relief?

A student may choose to request relief of a decision when they disagree with a decision and have a *good reason* for believing the decision should be different. What counts as a good reason, also known as grounds, depends on the kind of decision you are requesting relief from, the applicable policy and the level to which you are requesting the relief.

Successful requests are based on, and clearly state, the grounds on which the request is being made and contain supporting evidence. Without clear grounds *and* applicable evidence, your request is unlikely to be granted.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is there information about you or your circumstances that the decision maker didn't know and which might have made the decision different?
- Did the decision maker make a mistake about a rule, policy or some other thing which might make the decision invalid?

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- Were you misled or misinformed through no fault of your own so that you inadvertently did the wrong thing? (NB: this does not include missing a deadline you should have known about!)

For example: Ibrahim, a graduate student in Health Sciences, failed a course in his Master's degree program. Just before his final exam for the course, Ibrahim was informed of the loss of a close family member. He feels his ability to write the exam to the best of his ability was impacted by this news.

Decisions related to Academics (such as course grades or progression), and not related to Scholastic Offences, fall under the Request for Relief policies.

Since Ibrahim is a Master's student, this academic decision falls under the Procedure for Graduate Student Academic Requests for Relief. Under the policy, Ibrahim could appeal the academic decision on the grounds of *compassion*.

Who do I request relief from?

To determine to whom to submit your request for relief, you need to know the following:

☐ The applicable policy for the decision

The policy will normally dictate who *can* make a decision, as well as the next level of appeal.

E.g.: in the Request for Relief policies, the decanal level is different for undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, undergraduate faculties without departments have a different request for relief structure compared to faculties with departments.

☐ The original decision maker

Be sure you understand the role of the original decision maker and their authority to make a decision under the policy.

E.g.: Some decisions can only be made at a Decanal level (such as requiring a student to withdraw) where others can be initiated by an Undergraduate Chair or an instructor (such as declining non-medical accommodations).

☐ Who has the authority to change or overturn the original decision

Similarly to the original decision maker, it's important to understand who has the authority to change or overturn a decision. The authority to alter a past decision may be based on the level of the decision maker or it may be based on the outcome sought.

E.g.: A decision made by an instructor may be overturned or changed by an Undergraduate Chair or a Dean (or Dean Designate).

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When should I request relief?

Requests for relief should be made as soon as possible, but there are some important timelines to keep in mind.

Undergraduate Requests for Relief*

- If you are requesting relief for a **component** in a course (e.g.: an assignment or quiz), your request must be made within **3 weeks** of receiving the mark on the component.
- When requesting relief for a **final course grade**, the deadline for requesting is based on when the course is offered:
 - December Marks: January 31
 - April/May Marks: June 30
 - Intersession: July 31
 - Summer Evening: August 31
 - Summer Day: September 15
 - Spring/Summer Distance: October 15
- Requesting relief for scholastic offences must be made within **3 weeks** of receiving the decision letter.
- If appealing to the **Senate Review Board Academic (SRBA)**, appeals must be filed no later than **6 weeks** after the date of the Dean's decision.

*In the **Doctor of Medicine Program**, a request for relief against a mark must be initiated with the instructor within **4 weeks** of the mark being approved by the appropriate administrative committee. All other requests for relief must be made within four weeks of the date of the decision giving rise to the request for relief. A request for relief to each successive level of appeal must be made within four weeks of the date of the decision at the prior level.

*In the **Faculty of Law**, a request for relief against a final grade in a course must be submitted to the Dean by **March 1** for First Term Marks and by **June 30** for Spring Term Marks. All other applicable deadlines are as set out above.

*In the **Ivey Business School**, a request for relief against a mark must be initiated with the instructor within **6 weeks** of the mark being issued. All other requests for relief must be made within **6 weeks** of the date of the decision giving rise to the request for relief. A request for relief to each successive level of appeal must be made within **6 weeks** of the date of the decision at the prior level

Graduate Requests for Relief

- When requesting relief for an **academic decision**, a request for relief must be filed within **4 weeks** of the date the decision as communicated.
 - An academic decision may include decisions related to progression, grades, or other components related to a student's academics.
- Requests for relief must be made to the **School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS)** and must be made within **3 weeks** of the date of the previous decision.
- For **scholastic offences**, the deadline for requesting relief varies and is dictated by the decision maker in the decision letter.

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- If appealing further to **SRBA**, appeals must be filed no later than **6 weeks** after the date of the Vice-Provost's decision.

Residence Appeals

- **Residence Appeals** must be filed with the Residence Appeals Committee within **3 days** of being notified of a decision.
- Appealing a **Code of Conduct** decision must be submitted to the University Discipline Appeals Committee (UDAC) within **2 weeks** of the issuance of a decision.
- Appeals made under the Gender Based and Sexual Violence policy must be submitted to the University Secretariate within **2 weeks** of the issuance of a decision.

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How to request relief

A request for relief is normally submitted by email – either as an attachment or in the body of the email – to the decision maker. An appeal to SRBA, requires the submission of a form that will provide the structure for your appeal.

A request for relief should be written in letter form.

- You need a subject line that states your name, student number and the issue being appealed. E.g, “Emilie Smith, SN 789555121, request for relief for a regrade on Chemistry 1000 final exam.”
- Your opening paragraph needs to clearly state what you are requesting relief for and on what grounds. *e.g.: I am requesting relief for my final grade in CHEMISTRY 1000 on compassionate grounds.*
- Subsequent paragraph(s), need to explain your experience and state your evidence – you can include attachments of relevant documentation where needed. Be sure that all evidence and reasoning provided is related to the main ground/reason for your appeal.
E.g.: On the day of the CHEMISTRY 1000 final exam, I was informed that my grandmother had passed away. I was unable to write the exam because I was very upset and my family needed my support. I have attached a copy of my grandmother’s obituary.
- In your concluding paragraph, state your desired outcome. You can also take this as an opportunity to explain the impact that granting this request for relief will have as well as your plans for the future.
E.g.: I wish to be given an opportunity to write the make-up exam for CHEMISTRY 1000. As a Medical Science student, CHEMISTRY 1000 is required for me to be able to continue in Year 2 of the program.

Evidence

When requesting relief, you should include relevant evidence in support of your grounds and circumstances relative to your request for relief. Appropriate evidence will vary depending on your request for relief.

Examples of commonly used evidence: medical note, police report, death certificate or obituary, communications with decision makers, or a letter of support from a professional.

In instances where official documentation does not exist, use your best judgement when considering alternative documentation. For example, graphic photos depicting an accident, injury, or death are not appropriate forms of evidence.

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Additional Resources

Request for Relief Policies

- Undergraduate:
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_requests_for_relief_procedure.pdf
- Graduate:
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/graduate_requests_for_relief_procedure.pdf

Scholastic Offences

- Undergraduate:
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf
- Graduate:
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/graduate_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf

Other Policies

- Residence Appeals: <https://housing.uwo.ca/learning/resources-for-success/living-together/behaviour-management/index.html>
- Student Code of Conduct: <https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>
- Gender-Based and Sexual Violence: https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp152.pdf
- Academic Accommodation Appeal Procedures: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Other Resources

- University Secretariat Appeals: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/SRBA_appeals_procedure.pdf
- Western Academic Calendar: <https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/>