

TIMELY TIPS

Staff Management

Handling Sensitive Topics

OBJECTIVE

Students understand how policies and staff manuals guide coverage of sensitive topics and draft clear, school-appropriate language using vetted examples.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to the [Walsworth Staff Manual Resources](#) page
- Excerpts from the [Building a Policy](#) slideshow
- Shared Google Doc
- Optional: District/school handbook

PART 1

INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

Ask Students:

- What happens if a controversial or emotional issue comes up and the staff disagrees on how to handle it?
- Who should decide what is published, and how do we know?
- Briefly explain that strong publications plan for these situations before they happen.

Clarify the roles of three tools students already use:

- **Policy:** Sets guiding principles and decision-making authority
- **Staff manual:** Explains procedures and expectations for staff behavior
- **Style guide:** Covers writing and design consistency

PART 2

GUIDED PRACTICE (25 MINUTES)

Divide students into small groups. Assign each group one sensitive topic from the list below.

- Covering student, staff and/or faculty deaths
- Political coverage, including student activism
- Social media use by staff members
- Copyright and image ownership

Each group reviews:

- Relevant examples from the [Walsworth Staff Manual Resources](#) page
- Any applicable school or district guidelines

Groups discuss and take notes using these prompts:

- What guidance already exists in sample staff manuals?
- Does this topic require a policy or a staff manual procedure?
- What risks or conflicts could arise if this is unclear?

PART 3

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (15 MINUTES)

Each group drafts one clear section for their assigned topic using this structure:

- **Purpose:** Why this guideline exists
- **Scope:** What situations it applies to
- **Decision-making:** Who is responsible for final decisions
- **Procedure:** How the staff should handle the situation step by step

PART 4

WRAP UP (10 MINUTES)

Discuss the group drafts as a class:

- Is this clear enough to follow during a stressful situation?
- Does it protect both student voice and the publication's credibility?
- Is it placed somewhere accessible for all staff members to find?