



AN ADVOCATE'S TOOLKIT

**A Step by Step Guide on
How To Effectively Advocate**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction 01

Why This Guide?
Why It's Important
How WUSA Supports Advocacy

2. What is Advocacy 03

Types of Advocacy
Why Advocacy is Important

3. How to Create a Strong Advocacy Plan 05

Find the Root Cause 07

Ask the Right Questions
Look for Patterns and Themes
Talk To Others Affected by the Issue
Gather Facts and Data
Set Clear Objectives

Build a Clear Message 08

How To Make Your Voice Heard
Why Clear Communication is Important
How To Communicate Effectively While Advocating for Change
How Communication Changes for Different Types of Advocacy

Identify Your Audience 11

Where To Start
Why Relationships Matter
Examples of Key Decision-Makers and Allies
How Relationship-Building Varies for Different Types of Advocacy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Choose Your Methods	14
How to Prepare for Meetings and Conduct Yourself Professionally	
Amplify Your Message	
Social Media Strategy	
Boothing in the Student Life Centre (SLC)	
Know Your Rights and Responsibilities	
Prepare for Challenges	
Speak Up and Be Get Heard for Different Types of Advocacy	
Implement Your Plan	19
Put Your Plan Into Action	
Keep Track of Your Progress	
Look Back and Reflect	
Prepare for Obstacles	20
Overcoming Obstacles and Rejections	
Prioritize Self-Care	21
Don't Forget About Yourself	
What's Compassion Fatigue?	
How to Combat Compassion Fatigue	
Advocacy is Different for Everyone	
Self-Care for Different Types of Advocacy	
Creating a Healthy Advocacy Practice	
Know Your Resources	26
Taking Care of Yourself While Advocating	



INTRODUCTION

Disclaimer

Consider using the [Incident Reporting Tool](#) on the WUSA Webpage if you are experiencing immediate threats, harassment, or discrimination.

Why This Guide?

This guide is here to help you get involved in advocacy at the University of Waterloo— and beyond. Whether it's for yourself, your peers, or the larger campus community. It can be as simple as building confidence to advocating for large scale change on campus. We'll walk you through how to create an advocacy plan and how to navigate the ups and downs of making change.

Why It's Important

Advocacy is a way to make your voice heard and drive positive change—whether that's influencing decisions at Waterloo, accessing resources, or standing up for what matters to you. It's all about making a difference and creating a better experience for students like you.

How WUSA Supports Advocacy

WUSA advocates for changes that improve student life, both inside and outside the classroom. We base our work on student feedback, surveys, and discussions with students, like you, to keep our focus on what matters most.

As a large organization, we focus our advocacy on broader student issues, rather than individual cases. When it comes to smaller-scale advocacy projects, we are happy to guide you, whether you're aiming to shape university policies, raising awareness, or making sure your concerns like academics, mental health, or student services, are heard and accounted for.

We hope this guide will support your advocacy efforts and connect you with the right resources.



WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is all about supporting or recommending a cause or policy, especially to influence decision-makers or raise awareness about important issues. Essentially, it's about speaking up about something that matters to you and others.

Advocacy is your chance to speak up about what matters to you. It lets you act on issues you care about and work toward making positive changes—whether at Waterloo or beyond.



Types of Advocacy

Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is all about speaking up for your own needs and rights. This might mean asking for academic accommodations, mental health support, or fairness in university policies. It's about empowering your voice to protect your well-being and success.

★ Example

Let's say you're struggling to keep up in class due to a learning disability. You can reach out to [AccessAbility Services](#) and ask for extra time on exams or other accommodations. By advocating for yourself, you can get the support you need to succeed.

Peer Advocacy

Peer advocacy is when you help out your friends or fellow students by supporting their needs or concerns. It's about being there for others, offering advice, and making sure their perspectives are being amplified.

★ Example

A friend of yours is having a tough time with their mental health and doesn't know how to talk to a professor about it. You could offer to go with them to the meeting and help explain what they need, making sure they feel supported.

Group Advocacy

Group advocacy is when a group of students or a student organization comes together to address larger issues that affect everyone. This might involve advocating for changes to university policies or services that impact a lot of people.

★ Example

A group of students notices that the library closes too early during exams. They gather feedback from other students and take the issue to the University, eventually advocating for longer library hours during exams.

Why Advocacy is Important

Advocacy gives you the chance to speak up for yourself and shape your university experience.

Empowerment

Fostering a sense of agency and enabling people to identify and address challenges using their voices effectively, creating sustainable change.

Driving Change

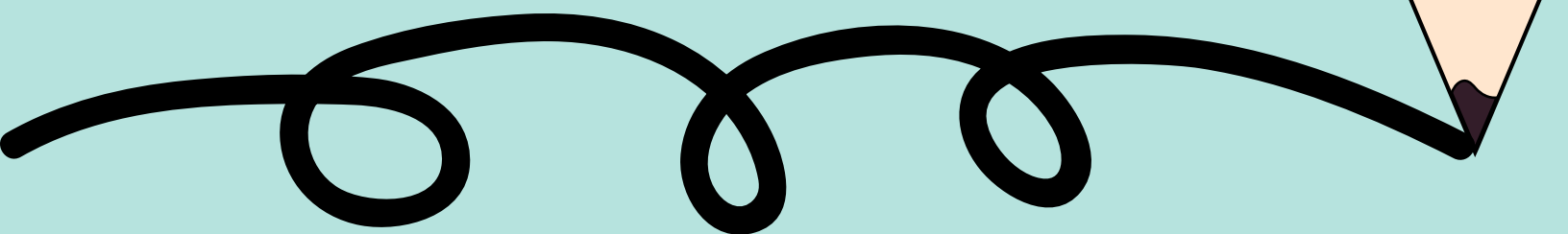
Advocacy is how real change happens—whether it's influencing university policies, improving student services, or raising awareness about important issues.

Building Community

Advocacy brings students together, creating a sense of unity as you work toward shared goals and support each other.



HOW TO CREATE A STRONG ADVOCACY PLAN



1 Find the Root Cause

Identify what's really behind the issue you want to address.

2 Build a Clear Message

Make sure your message is clear, concise, and easy to understand.

3 Identify Your Audience

Figure out who you need to reach—whether that's university decision-makers, student groups, or the larger community.

4 Choose Your Method

Decide the best way to get your message out—whether that's through petitions, meetings, social media, or other methods.

5 Implement Your Plan

Start putting your plan into action, this includes talking to people or organizing events.

6 Prepare for Obstacles

Be ready for challenges and think about how you'll handle them.

7 Prioritize Self-Care

Take care of yourself so you can bring your best to the causes that matter.

8 Know Your Resources

WUSA can sometimes assist by offering where you might find some answers. There are many helping hands around the campus that can help support you.

Find the Root Cause

1

When you're advocating for change, it's important to look past the surface and get to the heart of the issue. Here's how you can dig deeper and figure out what's really going on:



Ask the Right Questions

Start by naming the problem as specifically as possible. Follow with asking yourself, "Why does this matter?" and "What's actually causing this problem?" These questions help you move past dealing with the surface-level stuff and let you dive into what's driving the issue. Once you uncover the root cause, you'll be in a better position to make real change.



Look for Patterns and Themes

Issues don't happen in isolation. Look for patterns or recurring themes—are certain problems popping up again and again?

For example, if a policy keeps causing trouble for students, is it because of outdated processes or maybe a lack of resources? Spotting trends will help you zoom out and see the bigger picture, so your advocacy efforts are more focused and effective.



Talk to Others Affected by the Issue

Don't hesitate to chat with others who are also affected by the issue. Whether it's other students, professors, or staff members, hearing different perspectives can help you understand how widespread the problem is and give you a clearer idea of what's at the core.



Gather Facts and Data

The more info you have, the stronger your case will be. Do your research, gather personal stories, and collect any relevant data that backs up your point. This will help you paint a clearer picture of the problem and show what's really causing it, making your advocacy efforts more convincing.



Set Clear Objectives

What do you want to achieve with your advocacy? Set clear goals so you can stay focused and know exactly what you're working toward. This way, your actions will be purposeful, and you'll be able to measure your progress along the way.

Build a Clear Message 2

How to Make Your Voice Heard

Clear and thoughtful communication is crucial when it comes to advocating for change. When you can express your needs, rights, and concerns in a way that others can easily understand, you're much more likely to get the support you need.

Why Clear Communication is Key

Clear and effective communication minimizes misunderstandings by ensuring that everyone is on the same page, reducing confusion and improving the likelihood of action. It builds stronger relationships by fostering trust and respect, making it easier to collaborate with others, such as classmates, professors, or staff. When expressed confidently, your message becomes more persuasive, strengthening your position and increasing support. Communicating clearly also boosts your confidence, as it reassures you that you've conveyed your needs effectively, while breaking the message down helps you understand your mission better. Ultimately, it promotes understanding and collaboration, creating a foundation for mutually beneficial solutions.

How to Communicate Effectively While Advocating for Change

Here are some tips for communicating your message in a way that will get you results:

Understand the Root Cause First

Take the time to figure out what's really behind the issue. The clearer you are about what the problem is, the more effectively you can explain it to others.

Communicate Clearly and Simply

When you get the chance to advocate, keep your message clear and simple. Avoid jargon or long-winded explanations. Your goal is to make sure everyone—from your classmates to professors to university decision-makers—understands what you're trying to say. Plain language is your friend!

💡 Tip

Perhaps you have heard of the elevator pitch....it is a very short, concise, persuasive summary of an idea that can be delivered in full in the time it takes to ride the elevator (less than 60 seconds). Time yourself and practice. Have it ready so you aren't scrambling to explain the issue when asked.



Be Ready for Tough Conversations

Sometimes, advocating for what you believe in means having some uncomfortable conversations. Be prepared for pushback or even rejection and handle it respectfully. Don't take it personally. Stay focused on how you can work through the obstacles and find common ground.

💡 Tip

If you get resistance, stay calm and respectful. Respond thoughtfully and offer possible solutions. Keep the conversation constructive. For example, if a professor criticizes your work, instead of becoming defensive, listen carefully to their feedback, ask for clarification if needed, and use it as an opportunity to improve.

💡 Remember

If you're unsure of the answer, it's perfectly fine to say so. It's understandable it can be uncomfortable, especially when the topic is something we care about deeply. It's always better to admit when we don't know, rather than providing an inaccurate response.

Support Your Arguments with Evidence

To make your case stronger, use data and evidence—whether that's personal stories or hard facts like statistics or surveys. This shows that your concerns are based on real experiences, not just opinions. Anecdotes go a long way in building credibility with your audience.

★ Example

If you're advocating for longer library hours, you could present survey results showing how many students would benefit or share personal stories about how current hours affect academic performance.

Stay Organized and Keep Records

It's easy to forget key details from meetings or conversations. That's why it's important to keep track of everything, including notes, emails, and other feedback. This helps you stay organized and gives you something to refer back to later.

💡 Tip

After meetings, send a quick follow-up email thanking the person for their time and summarizing key points. This keeps everyone on the same page and shows that you're serious about the issue.

Be Confident, But Respectful

Confidence is key! But it's just as important to be respectful. Be courteous—even if the conversation doesn't go exactly how you hoped.

💡 Tip

Always show appreciation for the time and attention others give you. A little gratitude can go a long way in building trust and making it easier to work together in the future.

How Communication Changes for Different Types of Advocacy

The way you communicate will depend on whether you're advocating for yourself, a friend, or a group. Here's how your approach might differ:

Self-Advocacy: Speaking Up for Yourself

When you're advocating for yourself, the communication is more personal. You're directly involved in the situation, so your message comes from a place of personal need or impact. Be clear about what you need and why it matters to you. Whether you're asking for accommodations, a grade reconsideration, or extra time for an assignment, your message is about you.

★ Example

If you need extra time on assignments because of a disability, your communication will focus on your individual needs. Be honest, direct, and provide any supporting documents, like a note from your doctor or a request from [AccessAbility Services](#).

Peer Advocacy: Speaking Up for a Friend

When you're advocating for a friend, you're speaking on their behalf. It's important to communicate their needs clearly and respectfully. You'll also want to stay aligned with their wishes and make sure their voice is heard, even if you're the one doing the talking. Building trust with your friend and others who can help makes your advocacy stronger.

★ Example

If a queer friend is experiencing homophobia from a peer in class, it's important to support them in a way that respects their needs and goals. You could help them fill out the [Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resources \(EDI-R\) Intake Form](#) to report the incident or offer to accompany them to speak with the professor. You might also connect them with [a student organization](#) for additional support. Ultimately, the key is to communicate with your friend and understand how they want to handle the situation.

Group Advocacy: Communicating as a Team

In group advocacy, you're speaking on behalf of a larger cause, so your message needs to be clear, focused, and unified. It's all about coordination. Plus, you'll be engaging with a wider audience, so your message will need to be tailored to different groups (students, faculty, staff).

★ Example

If you're part of a campaign for more affordable food options on campus, your communication needs to reflect the collective interest of the group. You might write a petition, organize a rally, or speak at a town hall meeting, always making sure the message is clear: affordable food is something all students need.

When speaking to your peers, you could focus on how the issue directly impacts student life, emphasizing shared experiences and the urgency of the situation. But when addressing faculty or administration, you might highlight the broader impact on student well-being and academic success, using data or research to strengthen your argument and appeal to their responsibilities to support the student body. Tailoring your message ensures it resonates with each audience and helps build support for your cause.

Identify Your Audience 3

Where to Start

Identify Key People and Groups

Think about who might be interested in your cause, who would support you, or is in a position to help you achieve your goals. These could be fellow students, professors, university staff, or even local community groups. The more relevant connections you have, the better!

Do Your Research

Take some time to learn about the values and priorities of these groups or individuals. Do they care about the same things you do? Understanding what matters to them helps you tailor your message and build a stronger connection with them.

Involve Them Early

Engaging the right people early on is important. Ask for their advice, feedback, and ideas as you go along. Getting stakeholders involved early helps make your plan realistic by getting their feedback, ideas, and input on what's possible and how they can help.

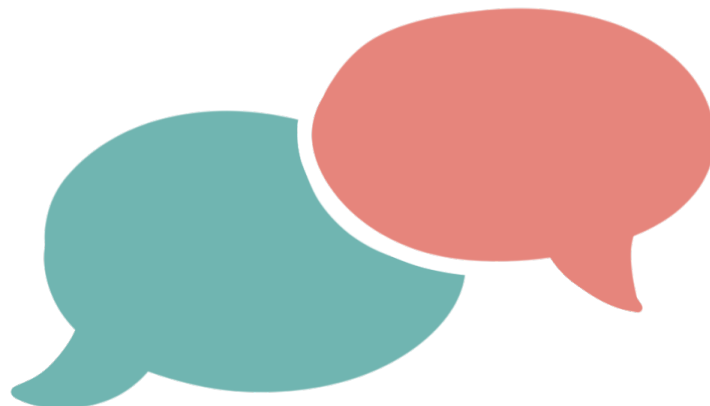
The more you involve them, the more likely they'll feel invested in your cause and want to support you.

Build Trust

Be open and honest about what you're working on and what you hope to achieve. Set clear expectations for both you and them. Trust is built on transparency.

Stay in Touch

The conversation shouldn't end once a project or campaign wraps up. Keep engaging with the people who've supported you and maintain those relationships. Regular check-ins keep the connection strong and could lead to more opportunities to collaborate down the road.



Why Relationships Matter

Building connections helps you expand your network, gather more support, and bring in fresh perspectives and ideas. The more people who believe in your cause, the bigger the impact you can make. Strong relationships also make your efforts more sustainable and give you the backing you need to keep pushing forward.

Examples of Key Decision-Makers and Allies

WUSA	Attending WUSA's annual general meetings is a great way to meet key people who influence student life on campus.
MPs and MPPs	Reach out by writing to your local Member of Parliament (MP) or Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) to share your concerns and ask for support.
Local Organizations	Find local groups that align with your cause and work together to amplify your impact.
Town Hall / Senate Meetings	Attending these meetings are the perfect opportunity to voice concerns and rally support for your cause.
Student Reps	Your faculty's student reps are key to making change at Waterloo. Reach out to them through your faculty society.

How Relationship-Building Varies for Different Types of Advocacy

The way you build relationships changes depending on whether you're advocating for yourself, a friend, or as part of a group. Here's how it might look in different situations:

Self-Advocacy: Speaking Up for Yourself

When you're advocating for yourself, the key relationships are usually with people who can directly help you achieve your personal goals, like professors, academic advisors, or campus support services. Building trust with these people can make it easier to get the accommodations or support you need.

★ Example

If you've experienced sexual violence and want to access support or resources, reaching out to the [Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office](#) can be a helpful step. Building a relationship with the staff there, having regular check-ins, and being open about your needs will make it easier to get the support and accommodations you may require as you navigate the process.

Peer Advocacy: Speaking Up for a Friend

When you're advocating for a friend or peer, your relationships will look a little different. You'll be supporting someone else, so it's important to understand their needs and build connections with people who can help, whether that's professors, support groups, or student organizations.

★ Example

If your friend who is an international student at Waterloo is facing barriers in class, you might reach out to [International & Canadian Student Network](#) for advice or help. By building a connection with them and showing your commitment to your friend's cause, you can gather support and ensure your friend's voice is heard.

Group Advocacy: Speaking as a Team

In group advocacy, you're working with a larger team of people who share the same goals. Relationship-building here is all about collaboration—getting everyone on the same page, understanding each person's strengths, and supporting each other throughout the process.

★ Example

If you're part of a student-led campaign pushing for more sustainability initiatives on campus, building relationships with other student groups (like the [Sustainability Project](#) or [GreenHouse](#)) and faculty members involved in sustainability is key. Working together to organize events, share resources, and amplify each other's voices is how you'll make a bigger impact.



Choose Your Methods 4

How to Prepare for Meetings and Conduct Yourself Professionally

Preparing for meetings and conducting yourself professionally can make a huge difference in the effectiveness of your advocacy efforts. Here's how to make a positive impact:

Before Meetings

Be On Time

Showing up a few minutes early is a simple way to show respect for the other person's time. It also helps you feel more prepared and sets a positive tone for the meeting.

Stay Organized

Bring any important documents, notes, or materials you'll need. Having everything ready to go makes the meeting run more smoothly and shows you're serious about your cause.

Time Management

Be mindful of how much time you have for the meeting. Plan your points so you can cover everything without rushing. If you're running short on time, don't be afraid to ask if they're open to scheduling a follow-up meeting.

During Meetings

Ask for Permission to Take Notes or Record

If you'd like to take notes or record the meeting, just ask first! Let the other person know it's to help you remember the details and follow up later.

Stay Focused and Concise

Stick to the point and avoid rambling. If the conversation starts drifting, gently steer it back to the main points. This will help keep things moving and make the most of your time, ensuring that you cover everything you need.

Know Your Key Message

Think about the most important thing you want to communicate. What's your main point or request? Remember your elevator pitch. Keeping it clear and focused will help you stay on track and make the best use of your time.

Professional Communication Tips

Stay Respectful: Use polite language and keep the tone friendly, even if you disagree. Respect goes a long way!

Listen Actively: Pay attention to what the other person is saying and respond thoughtfully. Active listening builds stronger relationships and shows you're engaged. You can also relay the key points back to them to ensure you understand.

After Meetings

Show Appreciation

Don't forget to thank the person for their time! Even if things didn't go exactly as you hoped, expressing gratitude leaves a positive impression. A simple "thanks for meeting with me today" can go a long way.

Plan for Follow-Up

Before wrapping up, confirm the next steps or actions. You can send a follow-up email to thank them again and recap any key decisions or plans moving forward.

Amplify Your Message

Advocating for your cause is more powerful when you have the right support behind you. Here's how to amplify your message and make it more impactful:

Connect with Student Organizations

Reach out to groups on campus that align with your cause. They can help spread the word, share resources, and provide additional support.

Reach Out to Campus/Community Experts

Faculty, staff, and campus experts, or community experts can offer valuable advice, and some may even lend their support to your advocacy efforts.

Support Offices

There are plenty of campus resources like the [Student Success Office](#). Check out programs or services they offer to boost your advocacy.



Social Media Strategy

Social media is a game-changer when it comes to amplifying your message. Here's how to make it work for you:

Set Up a Dedicated Account/Page

Consider creating a separate page or account specifically for your cause. This keeps your message focused and gives you a platform to engage with your audience.

Create Engaging Content

Use tools like [Canva](#) to design eye-catching posters, infographics, and posts that communicate your message clearly and attractively. Remember most social platform algorithms favour photo and/or video content!

Petitions & Calls to Action

You can launch online petitions or calls to action to gather support. Websites like [Change.org](#) are great for collecting signatures and raising awareness. Also, directly reaching out to leaders or organizations who the petition can be presented to is another effective way to push the cause forward.

Consistency is Key

Post regularly and keep your messaging consistent. This helps build momentum and keeps your followers engaged.

Engage with Your Audience

Respond to comments, ask questions, and spark conversations. Creating an interactive community will help keep interest alive and encourage people to get involved. Keep an eye out for people who are aligned with your cause. Follow them, and interact with their content!

Stay Informed

Keep up to date with trends and discussions related to your cause. Accurate, timely content will help ensure your message stays relevant and impactful.

Monitor Engagement

Track how your posts are performing using analytics. Most social platform have a built-in feature where you can measure your success. This will help you understand what's working and where you can improve.

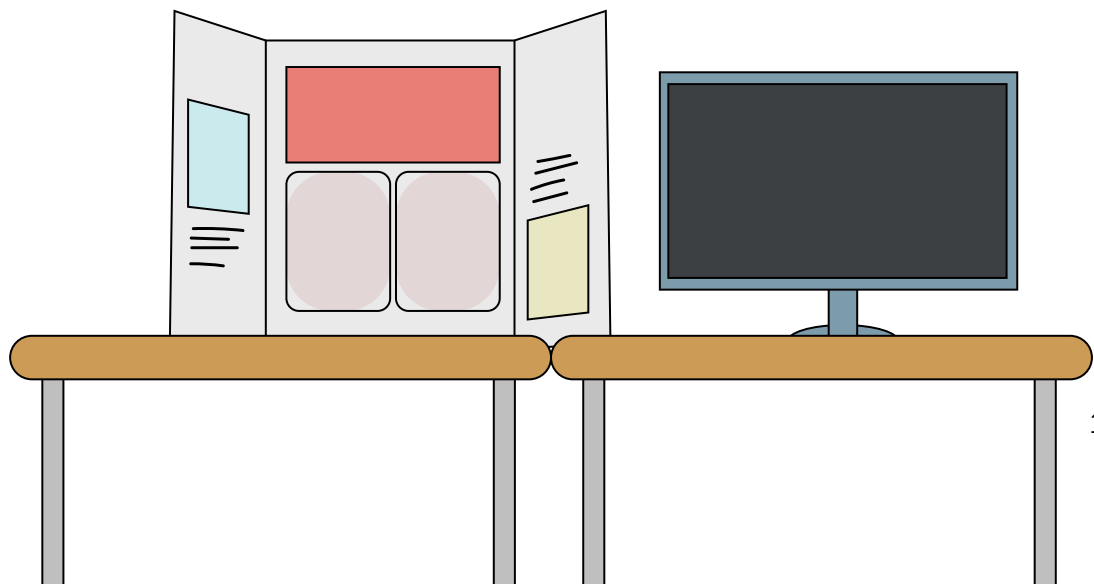
Important Questions to Ask Yourself

- What are my goals, and what's the key message I want to communicate?
- How will my audience engage with the content I post?
- Am I fact-checking my content to ensure it is accurate?
- How will I handle criticism or pushback?
 - Am I avoiding slander or harmful statements about individuals or organizations?
 - Am I being mindful of privacy and confidentiality, especially when it comes to sharing content like recordings of meetings without permission?

Boothing in the Student Life Centre (SLC)

For some face-to-face interaction and visibility, consider booking a booth in the Student Life Centre (SLC). Here's how to make the most of it:

Book Your Booth	Make Your Booth Engaging	Define Clear Goals
<p>Contact the SLC Turnkey Desk to reserve your space: slc.bookings@uwaterloo.ca</p>	<p>Make sure your booth is visually appealing and clearly communicates your message. Hand out flyers, brochures, or other materials that explain your cause.</p>	<p>Be clear about what you want to achieve with your booth. Are you raising awareness, gathering petition signatures, or getting people involved in your cause? Knowing your goals will help you stay focused.</p>



Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

When advocating, it's important to know your rights—especially when it comes to protests, gatherings, or public demonstrations. Here's what to keep in mind:

<p>Freedom of Expression</p> <p>Familiarize yourself with the University of Waterloo's policies around freedom of expression. Knowing your rights is key when you're speaking up on campus.</p>	<p>Respect Others</p> <p>Always respect students, faculty, and staff who may not be involved in your cause. Non-violent, respectful advocacy is more likely to gain support and create positive change.</p>
<p>Maintain a Safe and Respectful Environment</p> <p>Keep your activities respectful of others—don't disrupt classes or block access to campus facilities. Communicate clearly with your supporters about the goals of your advocacy, and have emergency contacts ready (legal aid, medical support, etc.).</p>	<p>Safety and Legal Considerations</p> <p>Be sure to understand the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and Ontario Human Rights Code as well as any local laws regarding peaceful assembly and protest. Knowing your rights and responsibilities will help you stay safe and effective.</p>

Prepare for Challenges

Advocacy isn't always easy, and challenges may arise. Here's how to handle them:

Handling Criticism

Be prepared for differing opinions or criticism. Respond calmly and respectfully—it's important to stay composed, even when the feedback isn't what you hoped for.

Support System

Surround yourself with supportive friends, mentors, or groups who can offer advice and help you stay grounded as you face challenges.



Speak Up and Get Heard for Different Types of Advocacy

Getting your message out there is key to making change, but how you amplify your message depends on the type of advocacy you're doing. Here's how to tailor your approach:

Self-Advocacy

When advocating for yourself, focus on making your personal needs or experiences clear. It might feel intimidating, but it's so important to make your voice heard—whether you're talking to professors, staff, or others.

- **Be Clear and Direct:** Keep it simple—what do you need and why?
- **Use Your Own Stories:** Sharing your own experience helps others understand your perspective.
- **Reach Out to Allies:** Ask for help from trusted professors, mentors, or campus support services if you need it.

Group Advocacy

In group advocacy, you're working as part of a team.

- **Unify the Message:** Ensure everyone in the group is on the same page with the key points and goals.
- **Use Multiple Platforms:** Use social media, events, petitions or another tool to get your message out there.
- **Organize Events:** Hosting events can bring attention to your cause and engage a wider audience.
- **Collaborate with Allies:** Partner with other student groups or organizations to reach a larger audience.



Implement Your Plan

5

Put Your Plan Into Action

It's time to get things rolling! Break your plan down into smaller steps, assign roles to everyone involved, and make sure everyone knows what they need to do. The key is to work together and stay focused on your common goal—everyone's efforts count!

Keep Track of Your Progress

Stay on top of how things are going. Check in regularly to see if you're moving in the right direction. Are your efforts making a difference? If not, no big deal, make adjustments as you go. Advocacy is about staying flexible and figuring out what works!

Look Back and Reflect

Once things wrap up, take a moment to reflect. What went well? What could have been better? Think about what you can tweak next time to make your advocacy even stronger.

Remember, advocacy isn't just a one-time event—it's a process. Continuous reflection and adaptation are key to getting better and having a bigger impact.



Prepare for 6 Obstacles

Overcoming Obstacles and Rejections

Hearing a “no” or hitting roadblocks in your advocacy can feel tough, but don’t let it get you down. Here’s how you can handle it and keep moving forward:

Be Respectful

Even when things don’t go your way, keep those professional relationships intact. Stay polite and professional—it’ll pay off in the long run!

Seek Compromises and Alternatives

If your initial plan didn’t work, think about how you can adjust it to make it more acceptable to others. It’s all about finding middle ground.

Be Persistent

Advocacy isn’t always a quick win. Keep at it, stay engaged, and look for ways to keep your cause moving forward. A little patience goes a long way!

Understand Rejection

Take a step back and figure out why your proposal didn’t go through. Maybe get a fresh perspective from someone who has not been involved. Is it because of budget issues, differing priorities, or maybe just timing? Understanding the “why” helps you figure out your next steps.

Be Flexible

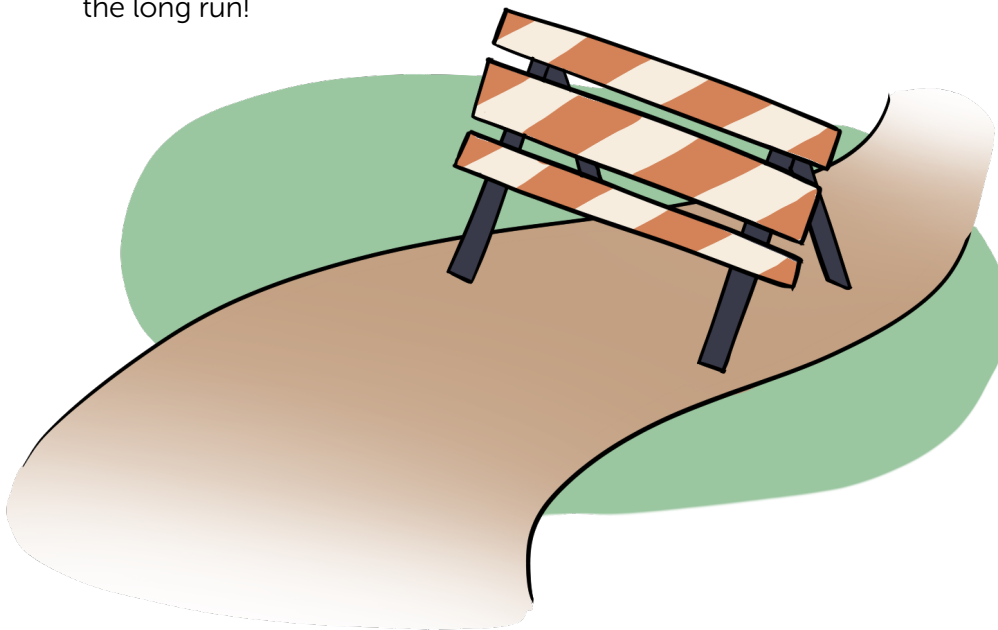
Am I open to adjusting my strategy based on new information or feedback? It’s okay if your original plan or message changes as new insights come in.

Stay Optimistic

Just because you face resistance today doesn’t mean your advocacy initiative is finished. Stay persistent, and with time, opportunities may open up. Rejection is not a reflection of your worth or the value of your cause—it’s simply part of the journey. Keep moving forward, learning from challenges, and seeking new ways to make progress.

Highlight the Risks of Inaction

Sometimes people need to understand the consequences of not addressing the issue. Point out what could happen if nothing changes. It might help shift perspectives.



Prioritize Self-Care

7

Taking Care of Yourself While Advocating

Advocating for something you're passionate about is amazing, but let's be real—it can also be exhausting. We all want to make a difference, but you can't give your best when you're running on an empty tank. Taking care of yourself is just as important as the work you're doing. Here's how you can stay balanced while being an advocate at the University of Waterloo.

Don't Forget About Yourself

You've probably heard this before: "You can't pour from an empty cup." It's not just a cliché, it's true. Advocacy can be emotionally draining, especially when you're dealing with heavy issues. So, make sure you're looking after you—your health, your energy, your mental space. If you're not feeling your best, it's harder to do your best work for the cause you care about.

It's okay to take a step back when you need to. Self-care isn't selfish—it's essential for keeping up the good fight in the long run!



What's Compassion Fatigue?

You might've heard of compassion fatigue, it's that emotional exhaustion that hits after dealing with tough stuff for a while. If you're advocating for issues that involve systemic injustice, trauma, or inequality, it's understandable you may feel overwhelmed.

Signs of compassion fatigue might look like:

- Feeling mentally or emotionally drained, like you just can't care anymore.
- Getting physically tired or stressed out.
- Struggling to focus or make decisions or feeling disconnected from the cause.

If you're noticing any of these signs, you might need a break. You're not weak for feeling this way—it's just your body and mind saying, "Hey, time to recharge."

How to Combat Compassion Fatigue

If burnout is creeping in, here's what you can do to take care of yourself:

Self-Care

Balance is key. Make sure you're:

- Getting enough sleep (we know, it's tough, but try!).
- Moving your body—whether it's a walk or a stretch, it helps a lot.
- Drinking enough water and eating well (we get it, midterms are overwhelming, but don't skip meals!).

Mental & Emotional Care

It's okay to feel everything. Find healthy outlets to express yourself—journaling, talking to a friend, or just doing something creative can really help. You could also try activities that calm your mind, like listening to music, drawing, or binge-watching your favorite show.

Mindfulness

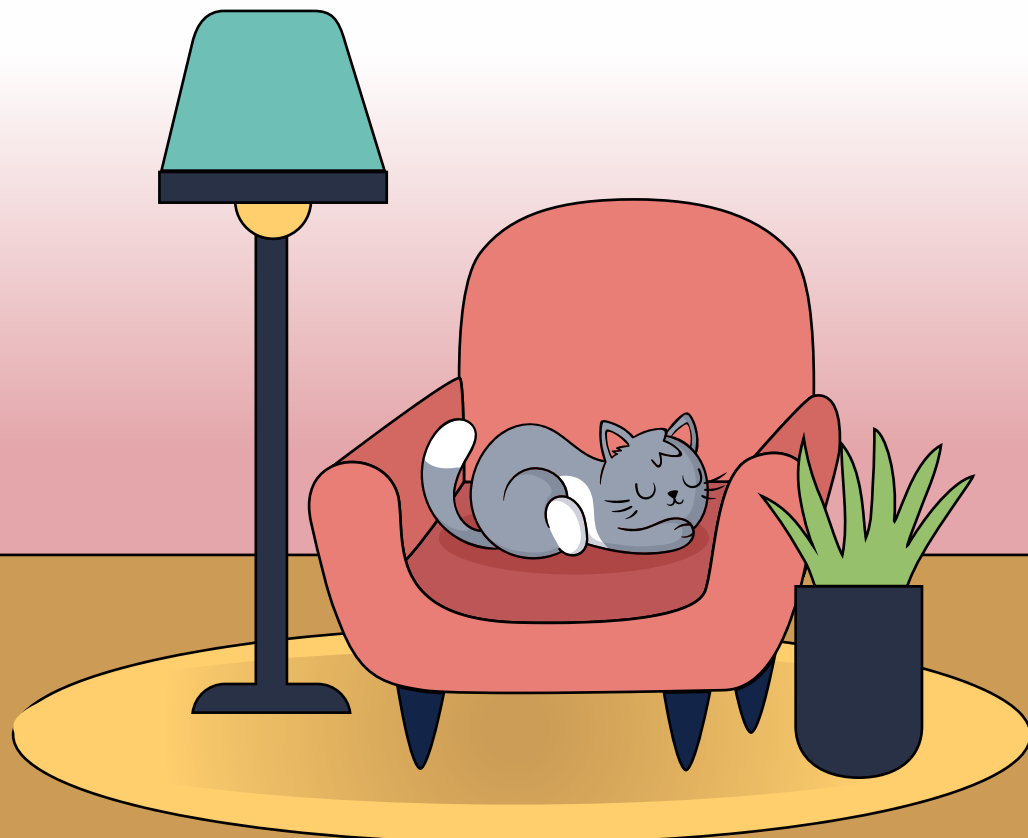
Practices like meditation or deep breathing can work wonders for reducing stress. If you're new to mindfulness, try apps like Calm or Headspace.

Set Boundaries

It's okay to say "no" when you're overwhelmed. Recognize your limits and don't push yourself too hard.

Stay Connected

Hang out with friends or family who lift you up. A little social time with people who have good vibes can help you recharge.



Advocacy is Different for Everyone

Advocacy looks different for everyone, and not everyone's experience is the same. Some people have an easier time speaking out or advocating for certain causes, depending on their background, identity, or resources. For some, speaking out about an issue might be easier, while others might face extra challenges due to their race, gender, disability, or other aspects of their identity.

This is where intersectionality comes in. Advocating for certain causes or groups can vary depending on your experiences, how you communicate, and your privileges. It's important to recognize these differences and be respectful. If someone else's journey is different, offer support without judgment.

★ Example

Consider a student who comes from a strict household where they've been taught not to question elders. This student might feel uncomfortable advocating to a professor or challenging an authority figure, even if they have valid concerns. In contrast, a student raised in a culture where speaking up to anyone, regardless of age or authority, is encouraged may feel much more confident in approaching the professor. Both students may have equally important perspectives, but their comfort levels and approaches to advocacy will differ based on their upbringing and cultural norms. Understanding these differences is key to offering support and not making assumptions about someone's ability or willingness to advocate.



Self-Care for Different Types of Advocacy

Advocacy isn't one-size-fits-all. Depending on whether you're advocating for yourself, a friend, or a larger group, your self-care needs might look a little different. Here's a quick guide:

Self-Advocacy

When you're advocating for yourself—whether it's asking for accommodations, negotiating a better grade, or speaking up about something personal—it can be emotionally intense because it's all on you.

- **Set Boundaries:** Don't stretch yourself too thin. It's okay to say "no" or take a step back when you need it.
- **Emotional Self-Care:** Try journaling, venting to a friend, or giving yourself space to process your feelings.
- **Mindfulness:** Staying grounded when the pressure's on can be tough. Try deep breathing or even a quick walk to reset.
- **Celebrate the Small Wins:** Recognize your efforts, even the small ones. Every step forward counts!

Peer-Advocacy

When you're advocating for a friend or peer, the cause can feel deeply personal. It's a little less intense than advocating for yourself, but it can still be emotionally draining, especially if it's a sensitive issue.

- **Support Each Other:** Check in with the person you're advocating for, and make sure you're also looking after yourself.
- **Set Boundaries:** You can't take on someone else's struggles completely. Know your limits and respect them.
- **Make Time to Reflect:** After tough conversations, take some time to process and recharge. You can't pour from an empty cup!

Group Advocacy

When you're part of a larger group, it's all about balancing the group's energy with your own needs. Group advocacy is powerful, but it can also be overwhelming if you're not careful.

- **Share the Load:** Don't try to do everything yourself. Let everyone take on a piece of the work.
- **Be Clear About What You Need:** Communication is key—let the group know how you're feeling and if you need support.
- **Take Breaks:** If things are getting too intense, step back and recharge. You'll come back stronger!
- **Support Each Other:** Advocacy is way more effective when everyone looks out for each other's mental and physical health. You're all in this together!

Creating a Healthy Advocacy Practice

If you want to be in it for the long haul, building a sustainable practice is key. This doesn't mean working yourself into the ground—it means pacing yourself and taking breaks when you need to.

- **Take Small Wins:** Celebrate the little victories! Even if big changes seem slow, recognize the progress you're making. Every step forward matters.
- **Keep Perspective:** Advocacy is often a long game, not a sprint. The issues you care about might take time to shift, but that doesn't mean you're not making a difference. Progress is progress, no matter how small!



In Conclusion: You've Got This!

Advocacy at the University of Waterloo is rewarding, but remember, taking care of yourself is just as important as the work you're doing. Prioritize self-care, watch out for compassion fatigue, and recognize that everyone's advocacy journey is different. Embrace the challenges but also be kind to yourself along the way. You're doing awesome, and it's okay to ask for help when you need it. Keep going—you've got this, and we've got your back!

Know Your Resources 8

Taking Care of Yourself While Advocating

Advocating for something you're passionate about is amazing, but let's be real—it can also be exhausting. We all want to make a difference, but you can't give your best when you're running on an empty tank. Taking care of yourself is just as important as the work you're doing. Here's how you can stay balanced while being an advocate at the University of Waterloo.

WUSA Advocacy

The [Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association \(WUSA\)](#) offers resources and various ways to get involved. Stay up to date through General Meetings, governance roles, and all the cool projects they're working on. Learn more at [wusa.ca/about](#).

Student Success Office

The [Student Success Office \(SSO\)](#) has a number of services to help you succeed both academically and personally:

- **Self-Advocacy Workshops & SMART Program:** Learn how to advocate for yourself and develop strong academic skills.
- **Peer Success Coaches:** Connect with a coach who can help guide you through academic challenges.
- Micro-courses on things like resilience and identity development.
- Help with writing effective emails and navigating the University's systems.
- Check these out:
 - [The Anatomy of an Email](#)
 - [Email Communications Checklist](#)
 - [Simple and Impactful Phrases to Use for Help in University](#)

Student Legal Protection Program

Got a legal issue? Whether it's academic rights, co-op disputes, or housing problems, [this program](#) provides students with legal advice to help navigate the complexities of student life.

Glow Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity

[Glow](#) is your go-to for resources and advocacy related to sexual orientation and gender identity. They offer a supportive space for students to find community and learn more about issues affecting the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Mates Peer Support

If you're dealing with academic, social, or mental health challenges, [Mates Peer Support](#) is here to help. They provide a safe space to talk things out and connect with others.

RAISE	Racial Advocacy for Inclusion, Solidarity, and Equity (RAISE) works to tackle racial equity issues and fight systemic barriers. They're focused on creating a more inclusive campus by advocating for the voices and needs of racialized students.
Women's Centre	The Women's Centre is a supportive space for students who identify as women, offering peer support, resources, and educational events through an intersectional feminist lens. They provide sexual health resources, workshops, a diverse library, and connections to campus and community support. This resource is all about supporting students who identify as women. They offer services related to sexual health, mental health, and healthy relationships, and they're a great place to find community and advocacy support.
Empower Me	Need some mental health support? Empower Me offers 24/7 access to wellness services, giving you the tools you need to build resilience and stay balanced—whenever you need it.
AccessAbility Services	If you need academic accommodations for any disabilities or conditions, AccessAbility Services has got your back. They're here to help you get the support you need to succeed at Waterloo.
Centre for Academic Policy Support	If you're having trouble navigating academic policies, need to file a petition, or want to pursue a grievance or appeal, the Centre for Academic Policy Support (CAPS) is the place to go for guidance and support.
Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism	The Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism (EDI-R) is focused on advancing equity and anti-racism initiatives across campus. They offer support for anyone looking to make positive change and create a more inclusive community.
Office of Indigenous Relations	The Office of Indigenous Relations at the University of Waterloo works to support Indigenous students and communities by advancing the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. Through collaborative initiatives and comprehensive resources such as bursaries, academic programming, and support services, the office fosters a decolonized and inclusive campus environment.
Sexual Violence Prevention Response Office	The Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO) at the University of Waterloo offers support to all members of the campus community affected by sexual violence, including students, staff, faculty, and visitors. They provide services such as direct support, consultations, and educational programs across all university campuses and affiliates.



Suggestions

Is there something you would like to include? Think we missed? We would love to hear more from you! Reach out to Amrit Khaira, Advocacy Specialist at akhaira@wusa.ca.



**WU
ZA**