

### What is fairness?

A person's experience of fairness is based on three dimensions:

**Relational:** how the person is treated at every step

**Procedural:** the process used to make the decision

**Substantive:** the decision itself

Use the "Fairness Triangle" in this brochure to consider the different aspects and tools you can use in your situation.

- Fairness may mean different things to different people and different organizations.
- Fairness may be applied differently at different levels of decision making; for example, a formal review or appeal process will have more rigorous procedural safeguards than informal processes.
- Fairness may lead to different outcomes under different sets of circumstances.

### The ombuds is a resource to assist in resolving student fairness issues.

The ombuds can provide you with information, advice, and assist with problem solving.

Inquiries are confidential.

Student Union Building, B205  
(upstairs, over Cinecenta box office)

**Phone:** (250) 721 – 8357

**Email:** [ombuddy@uvic.ca](mailto:ombuddy@uvic.ca)

#### Drop-in Hours:

Monday and Tuesday

9:30 – noon

Monday and Wednesday

1:00-4:00

For more information see fairness tools and references on the ombuds website.

[uvicombudsperson.ca](http://uvicombudsperson.ca)

## Fairness Tools

*From the ombuds office at the University of Victoria*

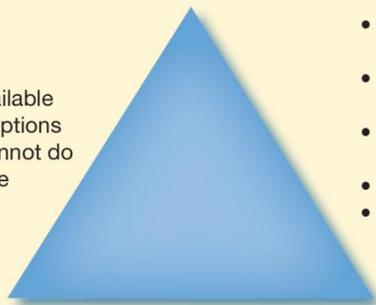


**BECAUSE FAIRNESS MATTERS**

## THE FAIRNESS TRIANGLE

### Elements of Relational Fairness

- Being approachable
- Listening
- Respecting confidentiality
- Being honest and forthright
- Making information clear and easily available
- Providing accessible problem-solving options
- Being clear about what you can and cannot do
- Offering an apology if a mistake is made



### Elements of Substantive Fairness

- Having appropriate authority to make a decision
- Ensuring that decisions are based on relevant information
- ...are not unjust, oppressive or discriminatory
- ...are not wrong in fact or law
- ... are reasonable

### Elements of Procedural Fairness

- Providing notice that a decision is to be made and sufficient information for an affected person to know what is required or what is at stake
- Providing an appropriate forum for an affected person to present his or her views and to be heard
- Being impartial and unbiased
- Making a decision in a reasonable time
- Providing clear and appropriate reasons for decisions

### Tips for fairness:

If a decision is made about you:

- Respectful communication is key: listen attentively, ask questions, and clarify procedures, standards and expectations. Inquire rather than accuse. Explain yourself with clarity.
- Consult as needed with other services or resources.
- If the situation is not resolved, ask about next steps in the process.

E.g. Rather than saying to your instructor: *“This grade is completely unfair! Jon didn’t write as well as I did but got a higher grade!”*

Consider: *“I think my grade is inconsistent with the quality of work I put into the project. What are the expectations for grading?”* If needed, ask: *“What is the process for reviewing a grade?”*

If you are making the decision:

### Relational fairness tools

- Listening to understand helps build trust and reciprocal respect even when the decision is not favourable.
- Ask for relevant information, explore any extenuating circumstances, consider appropriate exceptions, identify options or referrals, etc.

### Procedural fairness tools

- Procedural requirements increase with the seriousness of the issue, the potential consequences, and/or the level of decision-making.
- E.g. 1: A student and instructor may sort out a late penalty on a paper by considering the course outline and a brief exchange of information.
- E.g. 2: A plagiarism issue with a potential failing grade is decided in writing by the Chair (or by the Dean) after written notification to the student and an opportunity to respond.

### Substantive fairness tools

- Good relational and procedural components help get to good substantive decisions.
- Other things to consider: Who is the right person/level to decide? When do I consult? When do I refer to another level or service? What other angles and criteria do I need to consider? (E.g.: policy, practice, equitable treatment, accommodation for a disability, etc.)