

WRITING SAMPLES

When should I provide a writing sample? Only when requested to do so by the employer. Be prepared, however, by bringing a copy of your writing sample to an interview. Do not offer it unless the employer asks for it which will sometimes be at the second or third interview.

What should I use as a writing sample? Select a sample that is sufficiently recent to demonstrate your current writing and analysis skills. Good writing samples are legal writing -- persuasive writing that allows the employer to evaluate advocacy skills. Unless you are a first-year law student, most employers want to read a writing sample that you drafted as a law clerk or intern. Among your best choices for a writing sample are memoranda or briefs. Please contact your designated career services professional if you encounter any difficulty in selecting a writing sample.

MAKE YOUR WRITING SAMPLE READER-FRIENDLY

Attach a cover memo that spells out context for the sample. Please include a cover memo describing the circumstances under which the assignment was written; a one-sentence overview of the assignment and your assigned role in it; the details of the assignment; an explanation of omitted items; and an explanation of whether and how the sample was critiqued by your professor during the drafting process. Please see the Career Services website for a cover memo sample.

Revision never ends. Your writing sample must be error free! For the busy employer who is reading a dozen samples, the easiest, quickest way to shorten the list is to reject applicants whose writing sample contains grammar, syntax, punctuation, or citation errors. If you received comments from your professor on the final draft of the writing, make sure to incorporate that feedback. If you have questions, contact the professor who graded the assignment and let them know that you would like to use the writing as a sample for a job application. Prepare the document so that it is easy to read, with ample margins and preferably, a basic 12-point typeface. Use regular white paper. You should refrain from submitting writing samples in elaborate notebooks or binders.

Consider omitting portions for length. Ideally, a good writing sample should be approximately 5-10 pages in length. Pay careful attention to any length guidelines provided by the employer in a job posting. When you reduce a previously written document to create a more manageable length, you should make sure not to delete necessary context. Any omissions should be noted in the cover memo.

OTHER ITEMS OF NOTE

What if I wrote only part of the memorandum? The writing sample should allow an employer to assess your work. Do not submit a writing sample that was extensively revised by your supervising attorney or written in conjunction with another student (moot court brief). If, however, the writing sample is a brief or other document that you wrote, signed by a supervising attorney, you should explain in a cover memo your part in drafting the final product and neatly cross out parts you did not write.

Can I submit the writing sample as it is or do I need to redact confidential information?

If you are sending something you worked on for an employer, be sure to obtain (and make clear to the prospective employer that you have obtained) the employer's permission to use the materials. Be very aware of confidentiality issues with memos and exclude client-identifying information. A fictitious character, such as "ABC Co.," should be inserted to maintain the flow of the writing sample when confidential material is redacted.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS FOR WRITING SAMPLES

Continually update your writing sample. As your legal research and writing skills improve, make sure that your writing sample reflects that improvement. The writing sample you drafted as a first-year student is not appropriate to use at graduation.

Submit a clean copy of your document. This may seem obvious, but make sure the writing sample is saved as a .pdf without track changes marks from an employer or professor.

WRITING SAMPLE CHECKLIST

DO:

- Put your name on it

- Provide a cover sheet or cover memo, explaining the nature and origin of the writing, and the citation style used (ALWD vs. Bluebook)

- If sample is a class assignment, explain if assignment was closed or open universe for legal research purposes

- Include page numbers

- Meet page limits (5-10 pages; or shorter if requested)

- Obtain your supervisor's permission

- Redact any confidential or identifying information

- Make sure it is error-free, grammatically correct with NO TYPOS

DON'T:

- Leave grades/marks/track changes on it

- Use fancy binders and/or have it bound

- Provide faded or unclear copy