

Purpose of Your Writing Sample

Employers may request a writing sample to evaluate your research, writing and analytical skills. As prospective employers prefer a “real world” example of your writing, your sample should be legal in nature. You may select a piece you wrote for Law Skills, a journal article, a paper submitted for a writing competition, or a memorandum or brief you prepared for an employer. Whatever you select, ensure that your sample demonstrates the quality, persuasiveness and thoroughness you intend to produce for the employer to which you are submitting it. Choose a writing sample in whose quality you are confident, contains issues and arguments that you can comfortably explain in an interview, and is your recent work (and presumably more practiced in its research and writing). You may submit a writing sample focused on area of law different from the one to which you are applying, but it should be relevant to your employer.

The writing sample should be your own work product. If your writing sample was submitted for a class or to an employer, be sure to indicate on your cover sheet (see below) the extent to which you incorporated comments and revisions by your professor or others. If you use a piece that was prepared for an employer, be sure to redact any identifying client information and get your employer’s permission to use it. Pieces that have been co-drafted or re-written by others should not be used as samples. Law Skills papers or other writing samples that were reviewed and critiqued by others are fine, as long as you are the one who did any re-drafting.

As with your other application materials, your writing sample must be error-free. Proofread it for typographical and spelling errors, incorrect grammar usage, and improper bluebook citations. You also may wish to have someone else review.

When to Submit Your Writing Sample

Many employers request a writing sample with your application materials or later in the selection process. You should not send a writing sample with your initial employment application unless it is requested. Some employers request a writing sample at the interview stage, so be sure to have a copy with you at any screening or call-back interview.

Writing Sample Length

As a general rule, a writing sample of 5–10 pages in length sufficiently demonstrates your writing ability. Judicial clerkship applicants may want to submit a writing sample

that is 10-15 pages in length. Some employers, including judges, may specify the length they prefer to receive, so pay attention to application requirements, keeping in mind that employers may receive hundreds of applications and may not read your sample if it is too long.

If your preferred writing sample is longer than the recommended page length, you are encouraged to show your editing skills by removing certain sections (e.g., statement of facts, less persuasive arguments). After making edits, review the excerpted writing sample in its entirety to ensure it is still understandable. You may want to add a brief explanation on your cover sheet of the sections.

Writing Sample Cover Sheet

A cover sheet is useful to provide your contact information (in the same format as your resume header), describe the origin and purpose of the writing sample (e.g., memorandum assigned in Law Skills, brief drafted for an employer), and truthfully state that it is your own work and that you have permission to submit the sample (if drafted for an employer).

Formatting

When submitting a writing sample via hard copy, it may be on plain white photocopy quality paper.

When submitting a writing sample electronically, convert the document into Adobe PDF format and attach it to your application. Submitting a PDF will ensure the receiver is able to view the document exactly as you intended.