



# Legal Writing Center

## **Putting your Best Foot Forward: Creating a Stellar Writing Sample for Prospective Employers.**

Lawyers write. A lot. Not surprisingly, your future employers most likely will want to assess your legal writing skills and aptitude. To do this, you will need to develop at least one, and sometimes as many as two or three, writing samples throughout your law school career to apply for internships, summer law clerk positions, research assistant positions, judicial clerkships, and post-graduate employment. These writing samples demonstrate your current writing style, as well as your research and analytical skills.

Keep in mind that you always want to tailor your application to a prospective employer's interest and should cater your writing sample selection for your audience to the extent possible. If you are applying for a litigation position, for example, you should consider submitting a trial memo, as opposed to a transactional document.

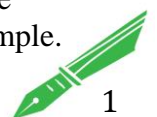
Finally, be prepared to discuss in depth your writing sample. It's not uncommon for a prospective employer to ask you to talk about the issues you researched and wrote about in your writing sample. Review your writing sample carefully before your interview, especially if time has passed since you initially drafted it. Before your interview, practice summing up your writing sample in thirty seconds or less so you'll have a polished response to the employer's question: "What is your writing sample about?"

### **How to do it?**

There are a few ways to create writing samples. Many students who are seeking legal employment or internships the summer after their first year will use all or a portion of a memo or trial memo or brief that were written in their first year writing classes, Introduction to Legal Skills or Introduction to Advocacy.

As you plan your classes for your second year, consider enrolling in workshop classes in which the final paper is typically a ten-to-fifteen page memorandum. Papers written for seminar classes are generally too long to serve as writing samples and may be too academic for a prospective employer looking for real world writing samples such as office memoranda or trial memos.

If you are fortunate to be interning with a judge during the summer, consider, with your judge's permission, using a bench memorandum with identifying information redacted from your sample. If you intern with a legal employer, set a goal with your supervising attorney in the beginning of the summer to write a research memorandum that you can use as a writing sample.



If your writing sample is created in connection with an internship or employment outside of the law school, you must indicate on your cover sheet or in your letter applying for the position that you expressly received permission to use this product as your sample. In addition, you remove all confidential and identifying client information.

Even if you have a writing sample from your first year, think about whether new documents that you draft either in school or with internships or summer employment can work as writing samples. These newer samples may demonstrate improvement in your writing, research, and citation skills that you have learned since your first year. You should constantly be practicing and improving your writing through course work, internships, and employment.

### **And keep in mind the following:**

- Choose a writing sample that demonstrates your analytical skills. A writing sample must demonstrate that you know how to analyze the law, apply the law to a factual situation, and distinguish and analogize cases. Your writing sample must also be your own work. If you received substantial assistance in drafting or revising this work, you should consider using another writing sample. If your sample was subject to light editorial suggestions and substantive feedback (e.g., you met with a Legal Writing Fellow once or twice), you may note that you received such assistance on our coversheet.
- Your writing sample should not be longer than ten pages. Seven to ten pages is common (some employers may request a shorter or a longer sample). If you have a writing sample that exceeds more than ten pages, it's fine to use only a portion of it that reflects your best work. For example, your 1L Introduction to Advocacy class culminates with students writing an appellate brief addressing two issues. You could pick one of the issues to keep your writing sample under ten pages. Depending on the nature of the legal issue and the length of your analysis, you may want to incorporate some or all of your introduction and statement of facts but not use other parts of your appellate brief such as your questions presented or standard of review.
- To give context to the reader regarding what you are submitting, you should write a brief two-to-three paragraph synopsis explaining the background for the writing sample that you have created. Keep in mind that the clarity of your synopsis will determine whether the reader continues to read your writing sample, so you spend some time writing it and seek feedback on its effectiveness. Your synopsis will be placed on a separate cover page accompanying your writing sample.

### **And don't forget:**

- Prepare your writing sample in advance of applying for internships, jobs, etc. to ensure that you promptly submit internship and job applications.
- Include your name on each page of your writing sample in case it's printed and the pages are accidentally separated.



- Carefully check your citation and make sure it complies with the BlueBook.
- Review your writing sample for accuracy, typos, and analysis. Your professor may not have commented on all mistakes in assessing your paper for a grade. Like any piece of writing, your writing sample may also benefit from additional revision. If you're not sure how to revise your paper, you should make an appointment with the law school's Legal Writing Center.

### **Need more help?**

Contact the Legal Writing Center for an appointment -- [law.ubalt.edu/legalwriting](http://law.ubalt.edu/legalwriting) or contact Prof. Diamond at [cdiamond@ubalt.edu](mailto:cdiamond@ubalt.edu).

