

## WRITING SAMPLES

Legal employers will usually want to see an example of your legal research and writing skills before making you an offer. Below are some guidelines to help you select an appropriate piece of your work for this purpose.

**Legal Reasoning**—A writing sample must demonstrate your legal reasoning and analytical skills, i.e., apply law to facts, and distinguish cases on their facts. Thus, an academic survey of case law or a note that summarizes a recently published decision is not the best choice as it does not include legal analysis. Possible writing samples include:

- A memorandum from your legal writing class.
- Your portion of your moot court brief. The best way to present an excerpt is to keep the statement of facts, the table of contents, and your argument, or a section thereof. You should indicate that sections have been redacted for length.
- A memorandum of law or brief that you created during an internship. Redact any information such as the client's name or identifying characteristics to protect privilege. You should always ask for permission from your employer first before using your work product as a writing sample.
- A memorandum or draft opinion you wrote for a judge during an internship. Again, you must ask for permission. Your writing sample should always be what you provided the judge, and not the opinion itself.

**Length**—Unless employers indicate otherwise, writing samples generally should be 7-10 pages (some employers may request 5, in rare instances 12). You may excerpt if necessary, but remember to describe the nature of the larger document and context of the analysis in your cover sheet. Re-read it to make sure the shorter version makes sense and flows well.

**Recent**—Writing samples should be current, and reflect your best possible effort.

**Practical**—Employers prefer to see work product from an internship or law clerk position.

**Proofread**—Typos, poor grammar, or incorrect citations will disqualify you for the job.

**Blue Book**—Cite legal authority accurately and in proper “Blue Book” format.

**Confidentiality**—As mentioned above, if you are using a sample from a job or internship be sure to obtain permission for any documents not considered public record. In addition, take out any confidential or privileged information. You should use fictitious names rather than blacking out the information, but indicate you have done so in your cover sheet. For legal opinions, you must obtain the express permission of your judge and only submit *your* draft of the opinion.

**The Employer**— Check whether the employer has specific writing sample guidelines, and consider your audience when choosing a writing sample. If possible, choose a sample that pertains to the employer's practice.

**Your work**—Use a sample that you wrote on your own. If it is a collaborative sample, excise any part written by others and be sure to provide an explanation on your cover sheet. If the sample incorporates light editing from a professor or employer, this should be noted on the cover sheet.

**Cover sheet**—Attach a cover sheet to your writing sample that offers a brief explanation of the document, including whether confidential information has been redacted or changed, whether the sample is an excerpt of a larger document, and when and for whom the original was written.

Examples:

Draft of Legal Opinion submitted with the express permission of The Honorable Lisa Simpson, U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland.

The attached writing sample is a memorandum for an Introduction to Lawyering Skills (ILS) course, Fall 2015. It incorporates suggestions by my writing professor, but is unedited by any third party.

The attached writing sample is an excerpt of the appellate brief that was submitted for the 2016 Byron L. Warnken Moot Court Competition. The sample includes the Statement of Facts, the Table of Contents, and Section III of the argument. Sections I and II of the argument has been redacted for brevity. It is unedited by any third party.

*Formatting tips:*

Use the same header you employ for your resume and cover letter, and center justify the text of the cover sheet, and place about 1/3 of the way down the page. Set your margins as wide (1” top/bottom, 2” right/left) to center the text.

Example:

**ALEX VAUSE**

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**WRITING SAMPLE**

The attached writing sample is a memorandum for an Introduction to Lawyering Skills (ILS) course, Fall 2015. It incorporates suggestions by my writing professor, but is unedited by any third party.