



**Washington University School of Law**  
CAREER CENTER

# *Writing Samples*



Many employers require students to provide a writing sample as part of their summer internship or post-graduate job application. Your writing sample provides an opportunity for you to showcase your legal research, reasoning and writing abilities. It is important to spend the time necessary to ensure that your writing sample shines.

## Writing Sample Requirements

**Authorship:** Your legal writing sample should be your own work. If you choose to use a paper or brief that was co-written with a partner, you may only submit portions that reflect your work, and your work alone. It is acceptable to seek input on your writing sample from others, including your professor, the Writing Center, or the Career Center, and to edit your writing sample based on feedback you have received. However, it is not acceptable for others to write any portion of your submission.

**Confidentiality:** If you are using a writing sample that was written in connection with an internship, externship, job or clinic position, you must first seek approval from your supervisor to use the work product as a writing sample. If permission is granted, be careful to redact any confidential or privileged information or revise your writing sample to eliminate identifying information.

**Length:** Review the job posting for specific writing sample requirements. Typically, writing samples should be between 8 and 10 pages in length. When editing your writing sample for length, unless otherwise noted in the job posting, it is acceptable to modify the original formatting in order to satisfy the length requirements (*e.g.*, reducing the font from 13pt to 11pt; using single-spacing rather than double-spacing).

If you must redact portions of your writing sample to satisfy the page limitations, provide a description of the redactions in your cover sheet. Typically, students will choose to redact portions of their work relating to one more discrete issues. In the document itself, add “[Intentionally Deleted]” to the sections you elect to delete.

**Citations and Editing:** Make sure all citations are in Blue Book format. Your writing sample should be flawless. Proof read it multiple times to ensure you have caught every typographical and grammatical error. A typo or missing pinpoint citation may be all that stands between you and someone else getting the job. Attention to detail is an important quality in an attorney, and writing samples are one way prospective employers gauge whether you possess this quality.

**Cover Sheet:** All writing samples should include a brief cover sheet that provides context for what the employer is about to read. At the top of your cover sheet, use the same header that is found on your resume and cover letter. Example cover sheets can be found at the end of this Guide.

## Selecting a Writing Sample

When selecting a piece to use as a writing sample, keep in mind that your prospective employer is looking for a skilled researcher, legal thinker and writer. An assignment either from law school or a legal internship that demonstrates your research and writing abilities is the best choice for your

writing sample because it displays all three skills. Legal employers generally prefer legal memorandums and briefs over research papers. As noted above, if you plan to use a document from practice, you will want to be sure to redact any identifying information and obtain permission from your employer.

**First Year Law Students (1Ls):** You should select your best memorandum, client advisory letter or brief written for your first-year legal practice course. While employers may slightly prefer an open memorandum or open brief because you will have researched the relevant case law on your own, if you feel that your closed memorandum or brief is substantially better, then use it.

For applications requiring a writing sample in advance of the completion of your first client advisory letter or memorandum, you may submit a piece of writing from your prior work experience or undergraduate studies. However, once you have completed your first legal writing assignment, you should use legal work product going forward.

**Second and Third Year Law Students (2Ls and 3Ls):** To the extent possible, you should avoid using your first-year legal writing coursework as a writing sample, as your writing will inevitably improve as you progress through law school and excel in your legal work experiences. Possible writing samples include: your write-on competition submission, your journal note, work from summer internships, clinics or externships, your moot court brief, or your seminar paper. It may also be beneficial to have two writing samples ready – one persuasive writing sample and one objective writing sample. Remember, if you are using a writing sample prepared as part of an internship, externship or clinic position, you must obtain permission from your supervisor and redact any confidential information.

**Clerkship Writing Samples:** For specific information on clerkship application writing samples, please reference the information found on the WashULaw Career Center intranet page.

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## WRITING SAMPLE

The attached writing sample is a legal memorandum I prepared for my Legal Practice I: Objective Reasoning and Analysis course. I represented Mr. Morris Frye in connection with his claim against Country Insurance & Financial Services (“Country”) for coverage of damage to his vehicle. Country filed a Motion for Summary Judgment, arguing that the damage was caused by a policy exclusion. The assignment required that I research and analyze relevant Illinois case law to determine whether the court was likely to grant or deny the Motion for Summary Judgment. The following memorandum sets forth my analysis for the client, and incorporates feedback received from my Legal Practice professor.

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## WRITING SAMPLE

The attached writing sample is an excerpt from a brief I submitted for my first year Legal Practice II: Advocacy class. The brief examines why a court should adopt an interpretation of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, 18 U.S.C. §1030(a)(4), that allows for a right of action against employees who misuse and misappropriate their employer's confidential information. I represented the plaintiff, Creative Canvas, LLC. The cases cited in this brief were provided by the professor. The following brief has been edited to incorporate feedback from my Legal Practice professor.

Lauren Bacall

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## WRITING SAMPLE

The following appellate brief was an assignment I completed for my Environmental Law seminar. I represented the fictional appellant, Backcountry Against Dumps, in its appeal of the lower court decision. I was responsible for researching and analyzing the two questions presented on appeal:

1. Did the U.S. Department of Energy violate the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) when it failed to consider the transboundary effects of a new energy transmission line crossing international borders?
2. Was the Final Environmental Impact Statement (“FEIS”) inadequate due to its failure to consider the significant environmental impacts to the endangered Quino Checkerspot Butterflies?

In the interest of brevity, the Questions Presented and Summary of the Argument sections of the brief have been omitted.

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## WRITING SAMPLE

This writing sample is based on a draft of a full order that I prepared as a legal extern for Judge Alice Wonderland. The petitioner in this habeas case (referred to in the writing sample as “Mr. Clark”) was a bank executive who participated in a scheme to fraudulently inflate the performance of a bank (referred to in the writing sample as “Bank”). The scheme to defraud ran parallel with the 2008 financial crisis and contributed to the bank’s closure, costing the government hundreds of millions of dollars. The petitioner was convicted of various charges of bank and securities fraud. He now moves to vacate, set aside, or correct his sentence pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255. This writing sample recommends a path for the Court to resolve this collateral attack.

For brevity, some portions have been redacted (as indicated by brackets in the text). I have received permission from Judge Wonderland to use this draft order as a writing sample.

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## WRITING SAMPLE

The following writing sample is an article that I researched and wrote for the ABA Public Land and Resources Law Student Writing Competition. The article analyzes the limitations of the Clean Water Act's jurisdiction as a result of case law limiting the definition of "navigable waters." This article won first place in the competition.