

Writing Sample Guidelines

Writing samples may be required by some employers or may be submitted on a selective basis at the discretion of students. Below are general "rules of thumb" regarding writing samples:

1. Employers prefer a sample of *legal* writing – that is, written work that shows the application of law to facts and legal analysis.
2. Make sure that your writing sample is neat, easy to read (font is large enough, ample margins), and is free of typos and grammatical errors.
3. The writing sample should be representative of *your* own work, not a third-person edited piece of writing.
4. If you want to use something that you prepared on co-op, you must obtain the ***express permission*** of your employer to use that work product as your writing sample. It is advisable to note on the front of the writing sample that it is being used as such with the permission of your employer.
5. Employers prefer short writing samples, five to ten pages. If you use an excerpt of a longer piece of writing, make sure you include enough facts so that the piece is understandable in its shortened version.
6. It is often helpful to the reader to provide some context for your writing sample, therefore, you may also want to include a cover page that explains: (a) the sample's original purpose (e.g., a legal writing class assignment; an internal memorandum for an employer; a court pleading); (b) when and for whom the sample was written; (c) the extent of editing by any third party; and (d) if the writing sample is an excerpt from a larger document, the nature of that larger document, including issues addressed. If you choose to submit a writing sample containing confidential or privileged information, you must identify the steps taken (e.g., redactions; changed names; consent obtained from a client or an employer) to preserve the confidential or privileged nature of the document. For example, the cover page can state the following:

The attached writing sample is an excerpt of a lengthy bench memorandum concerning a complex multi-party securities fraud case prepared while I was doing a legal internship with Judge X in the fall of _____. The judge has given me express permission to use it as my writing sample. The attached excerpt includes the facts and one of the legal issues addressed in the lengthier memorandum.
7. Remove confidential identifying information. If you redact the names of parties, it is preferable to substitute new names that identify whether the party is a person or corporation; for example, “Mr. A” or “Corporation B.” This makes the writing sample easier to understand.
8. Print your writing sample on plain xerox/copy paper, not bond paper.
9. For co-ops other than your first one, employers prefer something other than your first year legal practice brief. However, if that is all you have, you can use it as is or edit it further to reflect your advanced skills.