



**THE OFFICE OF CAREER AND
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Writing Sample Toolkit

A RESOURCE GUIDE TO HELP YOU
PREPARE A WRITING SAMPLE



STETSON LAW

Writing Samples

Writing Sample

The writing sample is an important component of most formal job applications. From an employer's perspective, the research and writing skills of an employee in the legal profession are very important along with your ability to focus on details and formatting. Therefore, your writing sample must represent your absolute highest-quality writing and attention to detail.

Some employers will request a writing sample to be sent in the original application packet, while others will prefer to receive it at the time of the interview. Be sure that you check what the specific preference is, paying careful attention to page restrictions and formatting and if you are not sure, always err on the side of including your writing sample in the initial packet. If an employer lists a document as "preferred" (as opposed to "required") our recommendation is to treat the document as if it were "required" and send it.

With your writing sample, you should always include a cover sheet of no

more than one page. Your cover sheet should note the following:

- Whether this was an assignment for class or something you wrote while under another employer's supervision.
- Whether it was written using ALWD or Bluebook as your reference for citations.
- Whether it was redacted and/or anonymized. If you are using a sample from a previous employer or clinic or externship placement, please note that it has been redacted and the parties made anonymous. This shows discretion and respect for client confidentiality.
- Whether the supervising attorney or judge approved your use of the sample as a sample. You should always seek approval to use a sample if it was written for an employer or externship/clinic assignment.

- A preview or brief (2-3 sentences) synopsis of what the reader is about to read. Consider including the issue, a few brief facts, what side you represented, and/or your position.

With your writing sample, you should always include a cover sheet of no more than one page.

[Simplicity Download](#)

- [Writing Sample Cover Page Template](#)

The Office of Career and Professional Development is happy to strategize with you on the best writing sample to submit to an employer, but keep in mind that our office cannot review any writing samples for content or grammar.

Writing Samples (cont.)

Below are a few frequently asked questions about writing samples.

What Type of Writing Sample is Best?

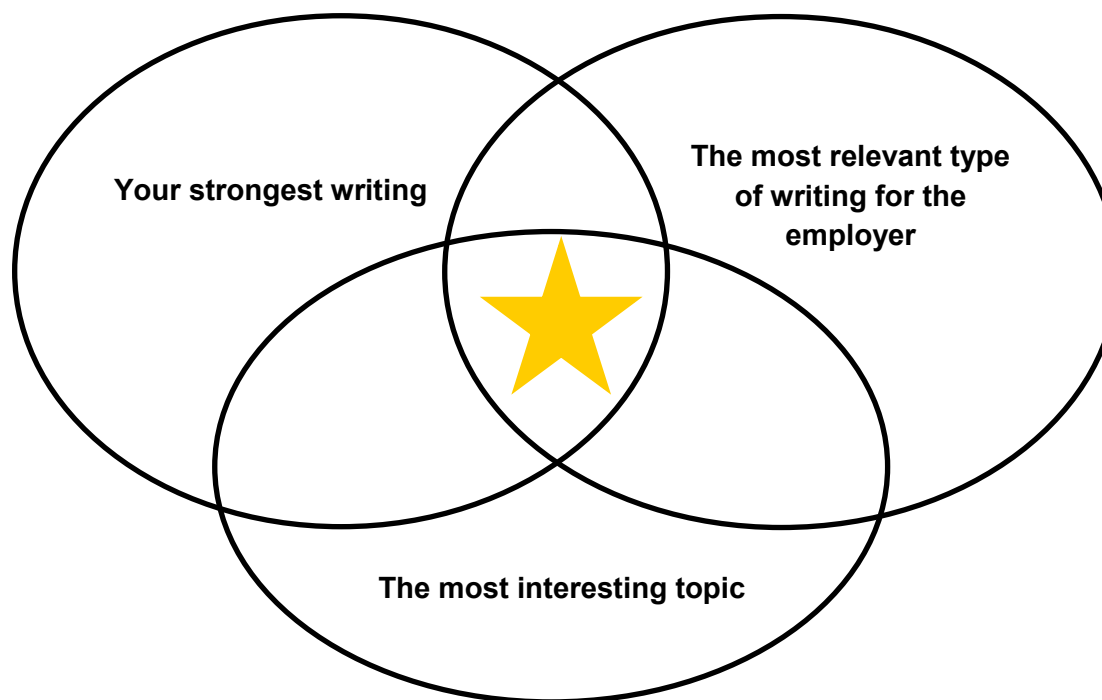
The type of sample that is appropriate will depend on the employer or reader. For example, if you are applying to a trial court, a sample such as a motion or memorandum may be most appropriate. For appellate courts, an appellate brief would probably be more appropriate. For a litigation firm, perhaps a motion you prepared or an appellate brief. Think about the type of work you would be doing for the employer and how you can best demonstrate that you are capable of such work through your writing sample. When in doubt, use your R &W II Brief, but be strategic going forward and look for opportunities to get a variety of writing samples to choose from.

Think about the below diagram for how you can best represent yourself through your writing.

A writing sample from a legal writing class is acceptable, but you should also consider using something

prepared during a summer employment experience or a clinical or externship program, or maybe even for Moot Court, provided it is your individual work, not the work of the team. If you choose to use a sample from a practical setting such as this, you must obtain permission from the employer or your clinic/externship supervisor to use the sample. In addition, all names and other identifying client information must be redacted.

As early as possible in your law school career, you should seek opportunities on and off-campus that will allow you to craft a writing sample.



Writing Samples (cont.)

Can I Use Work I Prepared While Working with A Judge?

If you have worked as a judicial intern or volunteered with a judge, extra care needs to be taken if you want to use a writing sample from that experience. You must obtain permission from the judge and clearly state this permission was granted on your cover page. You should also state that the writing sample is a draft of what you submitted to the judge so that you do not appear to represent that you wrote the final opinion.

Be aware that some judges will still frown on receiving a judicial opinion as a writing sample because, within a judge's chambers, the judge is always the author, regardless of who assisted with the opinion. If you claim authorship of another judge's opinion, the judge to whom you have applied may not think that you are trustworthy or discreet. While a writing sample from a judicial externship may seem to make sense because of the quality and the setting in which it was prepared, it is still not advisable to use such a sample.

Can I Use a Co-Authored Writing Sample?

Your writing sample needs to be your original and unedited work. Co-authored samples are not ideal unless you can easily separate your work from others. A law journal article that has been published may be questioned in that it will be perceived as heavily edited in preparation for publication. A more appropriate choice is an earlier draft so long as it is still sufficiently polished. You can then reference the published version on your resume.

How Long Should The Writing Sample Be?

The length of your writing sample should be enough to present your analytical abilities and organizational skills. Some judges will specify a brief writing sample (e.g. 10 pages or less), but where a page limit is not specified, your writing sample should not exceed 20 pages. A longer sample may be appropriate at the appellate level. For a trial court application, a shorter writing sample may be more appropriate.

If your writing sample is longer than what is requested, you may use an excerpt of your writing sample. When doing this, be sure to include sections of your sample that best demonstrate your analytical reasoning and writing style. Avoid using the facts section as part of the excerpt, but include some key facts for the reader in your cover page along with advising the reader that you are submitting an excerpt.

What is the Best Way to obtain A Writing Sample?

While you are a student, and as early as possible in your law school career, you should seek opportunities on and off-campus that will allow you to craft a writing sample. Often, it may seem easier to avoid post Research and Writing I and II writing while in law school, but to do so intentionally would be a mistake since most employers will require a writing sample and your writing will most certainly evolve throughout law school. Many writing samples come from experiential learning opportunities such as our fantastic clinics and externship experiences, which are highly valued

Writing Samples (cont.)

by employers.

While in law school, you should treat any writing assignment as a potential opportunity to create a writing sample. Ideally, you should have 2-3 to choose from for each application you submit. Many students obtain writing samples through the following courses or experiences:

- Advanced Legal Writing Courses such as Writing for the Judiciary and Advanced Legal Drafting
- An Academic Seminar
- Certain Skills Courses such as Appellate Practice, Pre-Trial Practice
- Clerking in a law firm
- Clinics and Externships
- Independent or Directed Research Papers
- Law Review or other Academic Journals
- Moot Court
- Post Graduate Fellowship
- Pro Bono Work
- Research and Writing I and II

Helpful Tips

As with any other career document, be sure you keep digital editable copies of all of your work. Be sure to either email yourself drafts periodically or back your documents up to the cloud (through services such as Dropbox so they can always be easily retrieved, edited, and customized. Many students who fail to do so find themselves scrambling to create something from scratch when they realize that it is a key part of an application to a desired employer.