



Boston College Law School

Office of Career Services

The Great Transformation:

How to Turn a Legal Writing Assignment into an Effective Writing Sample

During the interview process, it is likely that you will be asked to provide an employer with a sample of your writing. A Writing Sample should highlight your legal reasoning and analytical skills. Keep in mind these points when choosing a Writing Sample:

- Unless an employer indicates otherwise, your Writing Sample should be 5 to 8 pages in length.
- If you choose to use a Writing Sample that is longer than 8 pages, you should shorten it and include a Cover Sheet that provides context to your reader. Matters to address on the Cover Sheet include:
 - Original purpose of the Writing Sample;
 - When and for whom the sample was originally written;
 - If the Writing Sample is an excerpt, the nature of the larger document and the context of the excerpt, including any factual matters that are necessary to understanding the Writing Sample; and
 - If confidential information has been redacted (edited out of document), explain the nature of what was redacted (e.g., all party names have been redacted).
- If using an excerpt of a larger piece of writing, do not delete the entire facts section. The facts draw the reader into the document and can often provide a telling sample of your writing style, especially for someone who is not familiar with the legal issues involved in the analysis. Your facts section should not take up more than a quarter of the length of your Writing Sample, so you may have to shorten it to make it concise, yet it should be thorough enough that it contains all the factual details a reader needs to understand your analysis.
- Use a current piece of writing. Current work will most likely reflect your best legal analysis and writing skills. Ideally, your writing sample will be less than eighteen months old.
- Employers seek a well written and well organized Writing Sample. Because the reader will not likely be familiar with the law or the subject matter of your Writing Sample, the reader is looking to see how well you can write and show attention to detail rather than following a complex analysis.
- Typos, poor grammar, incorrect citation form, and inaccurate citations can and will be used against you. Your Writing Sample should reflect your best writing ability. Proper grammar and correct citations are a critical indication of your

attention to detail. Have someone else, with an objective eye, proofread the document for you.

- If you use a brief or other document taken from a legal internship, you *must* obtain permission from your supervisor and redact any confidential information (including blacking out party names). The Cover Sheet should indicate that information has been redacted.
- If using a writing sample that has been edited – either by a professor or a supervisor – *do not submit a copy with comments on it*. Rather, make revisions, proofread, and then submit. Note that you should *never* use a Writing Sample that was essentially coauthored.
- When possible, provide to the employer a Writing Sample that demonstrates your ability to practice law in an area of interest to the employer. For example, if you are applying to work for the Environmental Protection Agency, a writing sample concerning environmental law may be useful.
- Be sure to format the writing sample well. Use section headings so that the reader can easily understand and follow your analysis, particularly if you are using an abridged version of a longer piece of writing. Use page numbers, as well as adequate margins and font size. A document that doesn't look right may undermine the reader's confidence in the substance of your work. Like your resume, it must read easily so that even if the reader is unfamiliar with the substance of your Writing Sample, she will be able to complete the document and appreciate its organization.
- Some employers have specific Writing Sample guidelines, either described in their job posting or on their website. Make sure the Writing Sample you submit adheres to such guidelines.
- Use regular copy paper, not a colored bond stock.
- *Remember that a Writing Sample is an employer's first impression of your work product.*