



The University of Oklahoma College of Law

Career Development Office

WRITING SAMPLE GUIDE

It is important to remember that *all* of your written materials serve as “writing samples” to prospective employers. Your writing sample, like all other materials you give to the employer (resume, cover letter, reference list), must be error-free, carefully drafted, edited, and proofed.

The formal “writing sample” itself should be approximately five to ten pages long, should highlight your legal research and writing abilities (clear, concise writing with strong legal reasoning and analysis), and should be a carefully polished, error-free piece. There should be no typographical, grammatical, or spelling errors – such errors in your application materials could result in speedy rejection. You should always attach a cover sheet to your writing sample which provides information regarding the context in which the writing sample was drafted. A sample cover sheet for writing samples is attached below.

While some employers might not require a writing sample initially, they may request one at some point in the recruiting process so you should always have one prepared. The employers requesting a writing sample will often receive many applications and so some will impose a page limitation for their writing samples. Some of you have long writing samples, including briefs or memoranda that you may want to consider submitting. If the sample you want to submit is too long, our recommendation is to submit an excerpt of it with a cover sheet that puts the excerpt in context. For example, you are using a section of your appellate brief or an analytical section of a larger work, make sure to include a short cover page explaining the assignment as well as a brief statement of facts to put the work into context.

First-year students often face the greatest challenges in providing a legal writing sample given their limited experience with legal research and writing. Here are some suggestions specifically for first-year students:

- ✓ Ask the prospective employer the type(s) of writing samples it prefers from first-year students.
- ✓ Consider using materials developed in your Legal Research and Writing class.
- ✓ Start the process of preparing a solid writing sample early – do not try to edit your writing sample the night before your interview, and seek your LRW professor’s suggestions for revision.

Other general suggestions:

- ✓ If you use a paper, memorandum, or motion written as a class assignment, print a clean copy to give to the employer, free from grades or any other markings. If your writing sample was named “Best Brief,” make sure to let employers know. Note this on your resume as well as on the cover page of your writing sample.
- ✓ **If you use something written during an externship or previous employment, be certain that it does not disclose or appear to disclose any confidential information. To that end, be sure to redact any information about particular clients, including names and identifying descriptions. Ask permission from your employer to use the document as a writing sample.**
- ✓ If you have any questions about the strength of your writing sample, speak with a LRW professor or other faculty member.

Sample Cover Sheet for a Writing Sample

HEATHER CONNORS

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WRITING SAMPLE

The attached writing sample is a [memorandum/brief/draft order/etc.] that I drafted when I was [a summer associate/a summer law clerk/an extern/law clerk] at [Name of Firm/Organization **or** to The Honorable Last Name of Judge]. The assignment was [explain what you were asked to do & any limitations]. I performed all of the research and [this work is entirely my own **or** this work has been edited by a partner/associate or the judge/clerk]. [All identifying facts and names have been redacted for confidentiality purposes.] I am submitting the attached writing sample with the permission of [Firm/Organization Name, Judge Name].

Or ... (LRW assignment)

I drafted the attached writing sample my [first **or** second] semester Legal Research and Writing course. The assignment required drafting [insert type of writing (i.e., an office memorandum, brief, etc.)] analyzing [explain what you were asked to do]. I conducted all of the necessary research for the assignment **or** I was limited to the research provided by my professor]. By the assignment's instructions, the [insert type of writing (i.e., office memorandum, etc.)] could not exceed [insert number] pages.

Or ... (LRW appellate brief – could be revised to use for Moot Court brief)

I drafted the attached writing sample as an assignment in my second semester Legal Research and Writing course. The assignment required drafting an appellate brief with a partner analyzing [explain what you were asked to do]. I independently conducted all of the research pertaining to my section of the brief. I have included [only those sections of the brief that I drafted exclusively **or** all sections of the brief. I exclusively drafted parts _____, _____, and _____ of the attached brief]. By the assignment's instructions, the [insert type of writing (i.e., office memorandum, etc.)] could not exceed [insert number] pages.

Or... (Journal note/comment)

The attached writing sample is an excerpt from my Law Review note. For my note, I [explain what you addressed/analyzed]. [This work is entirely my own **or** This work has been edited by a member of the faculty/Law Review staff]. I have included sections _____, _____, and _____ of my note, which address [insert what they address (i.e., the analytical portion of my note, etc.)]. In sections _____, _____, and _____, I [insert what you addressed in the sections that you have omitted]. [The full note has been selected for publication in [insert journal name and volume number].