

SELECTING A WRITING SAMPLE

Why do employers request a writing sample?

Simply put, to see how you write, analyze, and organize your thoughts on legal matters. Keep that in mind when selecting your writing pieces so that you are choosing an effective sample.

How do I select a writing sample?

First, what was your best writing. Second, a recent product is likely a better representation of your writing skills.

How long should a writing sample be?

Abide by the employer's stated preference on length. If they don't specify, 5-10 pages is typically sufficient. If your writing sample falls within that range, single- or double-spaced text is fine. If your writing sample goes above 10 pages in length (if permitted), it will generally make sense to double-space the document. It is fine to use an excerpt from a longer document, but include a context sheet. (See sample on next page)

I am a 1L – what should I submit?

You can choose from your single authority memo, the multiple authorities memo, the final performance memo (aka the weekend memo), and the spring appellate brief depending on your timeline. Polish your paper using feedback from your professor. Note that your professor does not provide comments on your final memo.

I wrote something for my law-related class in undergrad that I am really proud of – can I use that?

No. You should use a sample from law school – a class, internship, or clerkship.

I am a 2L/3L – what should I submit?

Typically, memos and briefs from a class, clerkship, or even Supreme Court Competition are best. As a 3L in particular, try to use something other than your 1L work since your writing and analysis have undoubtedly improved. If you have a sample that relates to the employer's work, even better. If you must use a research paper (i.e., not a memo) from class, give the name of the class and a description of the assignment. (See sample below)

I co-wrote a brief for my competition team – can I use that?

A brief from Moot Court or another competition team may be a good choice. You will want to include the questions presented for competition. However, you should only use a writing sample that is yours alone. If you prepared one brief point and a classmate prepared another, use only the section that you wrote.

Can I use a memo or brief from an internship, externship, or clerkship?

Absolutely. If you use a document prepared for an employer, obtain their permission and make sure you have made all necessary modifications and redactions to preserve client confidentiality. (See sample)

Can I use my Note?

Typically, your Note is not the best writing sample due to length and extensive outside editing. If the legal analysis section is strong, that part could be an option especially if the employer requests more than one sample.

What to submit for a judicial clerkship?

Nearly all judges require a writing sample with the initial clerkship application materials. Memos and briefs are best – you want to show the judge you can be helpful to them by your strong legal analysis and organization. Be prepared to discuss your writing sample in detail and to field any legal challenges raised by the judge.

Can CDO review or edit my writing sample?

While CDO can always help edit resumes, cover letters, and scholarship statements, we cannot edit your writing sample as it needs to be your writing. We can look over for presentation or formatting.

Final tips? Proofread and don't wait until the last minute.

WRITING SAMPLE

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Context (You can change it to suit your style):

I drafted the enclosed brief in support of our client's Motion for Modification of the Marital Settlement Agreement and Final Order, entered on May 2, 20XX, as a summer associate with Lemon & Associates from June-August 20XX – Present. I received permission from my supervising attorney, Liz Lemon, to submit it. I have redacted any identifying information and replaced names with initials.

The issue presented in this brief addresses our client's desire to decrease his monthly maintenance obligation due to a substantial change in circumstances. Specifically, our client's declining health has substantially decreased his earning capacity.

(You may wish to add more about your position/argument and result.)