

WRITING SAMPLES

How to choose a writing sample:

- First, **it must be legal writing**. Given a choice between two otherwise equal writing samples, pick something you wrote for a legal employer over something you wrote for school.
- Your writing sample **must be an example of your best writing**.
- Before submitting a writing sample, whether something you wrote for a legal employer or something you wrote for class, **painstakingly edit the product to improve it**. No rule says you have to submit a sample in the same condition it was in when you originally wrote it.
- To the extent possible, **pick a sample that is the kind of legal writing you would be doing if the employer you're applying to hires you**. So, for example, give a persuasive piece to a litigation practice; give an analytical piece to a judge or research attorney.

Practical Considerations:

- **Meet any specified page limit**. If the employer wants ten pages and you have an otherwise suitable sample that is twenty pages, excise ten pages. On the sample, indicate in brackets where you have omitted certain parts. When condensing your piece, be sure to preserve necessary context. *Usually employers do not specify a page limit, in which case, a good general rule is to provide between five and ten double-spaced pages.*
- **A scholarly article seldom is your best choice for a writing sample.**

*Use a cover sheet on your writing sample:

- Use the **header from your resume as a letterhead**.
- Write a paragraph that **puts your writing sample in context**: What practice area does it concern? What issues does it discuss? Is it a simulated product written for school or something you wrote for an employer? If the latter, note that your employer allowed you to use the document. If for a school assignment, and you used the ALWD style manual, explain that. When you represent one of multiple parties, note who you represent.
- If you wrote your document for an employer, go the extra mile to **avoid disclosing sensitive information**. For example, don't rely on the fact your document was filed in court and hence is a matter of public record. And don't attempt to "redact" sensitive information simply by using a black marking pen. Instead use find-and-replace to insert fictitious names; change other possibly identifying details. By noting on your cover sheet that that you changed the identifying information in the interests of confidentiality, you start off favorably impressing the reader.

Do employers really read writing samples? They do when it matters; when you progress to become a finalist for the job, employers read your writing sample. It only serves you well if your work product represents you at your best.