



MSU Law Career Services Office

Writing Sample Guide

COVER SHEET

- Personalized letterhead: format to match resume, especially same font style and size
- State what the writing sample is (e.g., a legal memorandum, appellate brief, motion, etc.)
- Explain in what setting it was prepared (e.g., your first year Research, Writing, and Analysis (RWA) course; summer employment, etc.)
- Include one or two sentences to provide context to the reader (e.g., The issue addressed in the memorandum is whether ice on a sidewalk was open and obvious for purposes of a premises liability claim under current Michigan law.)
- Briefly explain what material you have redacted for length (if any)
 - If you omit facts for purposes of length, give a brief overview of facts
 - If you omit substantive sections of the writing for purposes of length, mention what issues were excluded
 - State that the entire writing sample is available upon request
- Indicate that you received permission from your employer to use the work product as a writing sample

NOTE: The CSO can review the cover sheet portion of the writing sample (but NOT the writing sample itself).

WHAT DOCUMENT TO USE

- Writing Assignments from Law School Courses
 - For 1L Summer Summer Applications
 - RWA Office Memo One has more revisions
 - RWA Office Memo Two reflects the learning that takes place over the entire semester
 - Beyond 1L Summer
 - Advocacy, Trial Practice Institute, Moot Court, Trial Team, Independent Research, etc.
 - An Upper Level Writing Requirement assignment or a journal note or article may be too academic; most legal employers prefer a “practical” writing sample
- Work Product from Legal Experience
 - Actively watch for and request projects that can be used as writing samples during your employment, externships, clinics, and any other “real-world” legal experiences
 - Only use employment-based writing samples with permission from your employer
 - Properly redact names of the parties and any other confidential or identifying information
 - Your employer should review the redaction
 - Do not submit an opinion or order signed by a judge because it is proprietary to that judge
 - Type “Writing Sample Copy” in the judge’s signature block, in lieu of the judge’s signature

- Consider your audience and submit a writing sample reflective of the work you would be doing for the prospective employer

NOTE: Always select a document that represents your best legal research, writing, and analysis capabilities.

FORMAT & HOW TO CUT A WRITING SAMPLE FOR LENGTH

- Check each employer's posting for specific length requirements; if no page limit is specified, the standard length is 5-10 pages
- Double-space your writing sample
- What to include
 - All headings
 - Question Presented and Brief Answer
 - Introductory roadmap section and at least one full issue/conclusion, rule, analysis, and conclusion (I/CRAC) section
 - If room, retain two full I/CRACs; again, retain all headings and sub-headings in the discussion section, but leave only the text for the introductory roadmap and one or two full I/CRACs
- What to omit
 - Statement of Facts and the Conclusion
 - Where you have omitted material, state, "Material redacted for length."
- Footer: page number, your last name, and the phrase "writing sample"

FINAL REVISIONS

- Review and remedy all substantive and citation comments by your RWA professor or employer
- Do a very careful review for grammar, punctuation, and style (GPS); the writing sample should contain no typos and use accurate GPS

NOTE: Have a classmate or professor review your final draft.