



BUILDING A WRITING PORTFOLIO¹

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Whether you are applying for a summer associate position at a firm, looking for a job in public interest, or interviewing for a clerkship with a judge, you will almost certainly be asked to provide a writing sample as part of your application. Different types of employers will ask for different types of writing samples: a law firm or a public interest employer may want to see a memo or brief with legal analysis, a congressional or lobbying employer may want to see a writing sample that is more policy-based, a judge may want a longer and more developed piece of scholarship like a bench memo. Building a strong and varied writing portfolio will put you in a better position to act quickly and strategically in response to employer requests for a writing sample.

This handout covers some general tips about developing a writing portfolio, including when to start, the types of pieces you should consider including in your writing portfolio, and ways to produce the actual written work for your portfolio.

When to Start

Start building your writing portfolio as early as possible. The memos and briefs that you write for your Legal Practice class are natural starting points, as those will likely be the first substantive pieces of legal writing that you produce. Although you **may not bring an in-progress legal writing exam to the Writing Center**, you may bring an old legal writing exam to the Writing Center for feedback and help with revisions once the exam window is closed. You may also come to the Writing Center to work on improving memos and briefs written during the semester.

If you are in your second or third year, it is not too late to start building your portfolio. You can start by revisiting past Legal Practice assignments and update them to reflect your current writing abilities. Seminar papers, journal notes, or writing produced for internships can all make a strong foundation for a writing portfolio. Remember to review and update your portfolio regularly as your writing skills progress.

¹ Originally by Megan Woodhouse, Senior Writing Fellow, 2010; updated by Jay Bickford, Senior Writing Fellow, 2026.

What to Include in Your Portfolio

- **Memos and Briefs:** The core of your legal writing portfolio will likely be your memos and briefs. Both showcase your ability to analyze case law and organize a piece of legal writing. You will write memos and briefs during your first year for your Legal Practice class, but remember to revise and update them as you progress through your schooling and career.

Know your audience. Before selecting a writing sample, consider what type of work you would be doing at a particular job and what skills are required for such work. Then, choose a writing sample that fits the job description. For example, a legal memo will likely be more suitable for law firms and public interest or government jobs that may focus on litigation, whereas a policy-based memo would suit a job on Capitol Hill or with a policy-focused organization. When building your portfolio, consider a variety of career paths that interest you and try to include pieces of writing that would be suitable for any jobs that you may wish to pursue.

- **Seminar Papers and other Academic Writing:** Longer pieces of academic writing are an important component of your portfolio. Spending extra time to perfect a seminar paper and get feedback from professors and peers can position you to use such a paper as a writing sample for academic positions, fellowships, or some judicial clerkships. Note, however, that some judges prefer more practice-based writing samples such as a bench memo. Additionally, polished seminar papers can be submitted for publication. Published written work can add further value to any portfolio.
- **Other Documents from Legal Practice:** Internships, externships, clinic, and pro bono work can be an excellent source for writing samples. If you have the opportunity to write motions, briefs, contracts, patents, or other legal documents, ask your employer if you can add some of this work to your portfolio. Ask for opportunities to draft different types of documents if you can.

Before using any writing sample produced for a previous employer, clinic, or externship, it is generally necessary to obtain permission from the supervising attorney or organization. Writing produced in a professional capacity may be subject to attorney-client privilege or other confidentiality agreements. If you receive permission to use such a sample, be careful to redact all identifying information, including any factual details that could identify the client or matter for which the document was produced.

- **Samples of Varying Length:** Different employers may want samples of differing lengths. You can prepare for this possibility by including samples of varying lengths in your portfolio, but also consider how you can revise a longer document into a shorter writing sample. For example, you may be able to alter a 10-page document to create a 5-page writing sample by removing a section of the argument.

Where to Develop Pieces For Your Portfolio

Academic Opportunities

- **Course Clusters:** Course clusters group many Georgetown courses into areas of the law. If you have an interest in a certain area, read the course descriptions in that cluster and look for a course that will enable you to produce writing samples relevant to employers in your area of interest. Visit the [Course Clusters page](#) for more information on the clusters and the courses found inside them.
- **Law Fellow Program:** Law Fellows assist faculty teaching the first-year Legal Practice class, have the opportunity to provide guided feedback on student writing, and are required to write a bench memo in the spring semester.
- **Senior Writing Fellows:** Senior Writing Fellows staff the Writing Center, study composition theory, pedagogy, effective writing tutoring, and have the opportunity to draft a seminar paper that is presented and critiqued by peers in a seminar.

Extracurricular Opportunities

- **Write-On Competition:** If you do well on the Journal Write-On Competition, you could consider revising your write-on piece and using it as a sample. Because the write-on competition has a significant time constraint, be particularly careful about revising this piece. If you choose to use a Write-On piece as a writing sample, it is important to make a note to the employer that the piece does not reflect independent research.
- **Journals:** Many journals require staff members to submit a note before they graduate. A well-written student note can serve as an excellent part of your portfolio and may even be published. Many journals cover specific subject matter; consider choosing a journal that matches your career interests so the topic of your note will be similarly matched to your career interests.
- **Barrister's Council:** The Mock Trial, Moot Court, and Alternative Dispute Resolution teams may give you further opportunities to develop your writing. Visit the [Barrister's Council page](#) for more information.

Experiential Opportunities

- **Georgetown Clinics:** Visit the [Clinics page](#) of the Georgetown Website for information about the types of work done in different clinics. Apply for clinics that will give you experience in areas of the law that interest you. Contact the clinic directors prior to applying to find out what specific writing opportunities are available in each one.
- **Internships & Externships:** A semester working in a legal setting can produce strong writing samples. Georgetown offers a limited amount of externship credit for

externships completed during the semester. When you use a writing sample you developed for another employer, be sure to check with the employer first and redact any confidential information.

Remember, you can visit the Writing Center to receive feedback on any of the pieces of writing in your portfolio. Consistent effort to revise and update your writing portfolio will help you be prepared to present a writing sample tailored to the job you want and will help your writing skills to grow as well.