



REVISING AND PREPARING A WRITING SAMPLE¹

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1. **Choose a Piece of Writing:** Before you can revise or prepare a writing sample, the first step is to think carefully about choosing a piece of writing that you will use as your writing sample. Your main goal in choosing a writing sample is to showcase your best work.
 - **A Note on Grades:** Your best writing sample may not be the piece of writing for which you received the highest grade. Although grades can be good indicators, there are other considerations when choosing a writing sample. Consider the depth of the legal analysis, the complexity of the legal issue and the form of the document. Additionally, consider whether you revised the document sufficiently for it to be the strongest work product.
 - **Feel Confident:** Make sure that you are comfortable with and confident in the piece you have selected. A prospective employer may ask you to discuss your writing sample in an interview, so you should choose a piece you are prepared to talk about, both in terms of your writing and the substantive law involved.

Check out “[Choosing the Right Writing Sample](#)” on the Georgetown Law Writing Center’s “Guides and Handouts” webpage for more on how to choose a piece of writing to use as a writing sample.

2. **Select a Timeline for Revising:** It is best to start the process of selecting and editing your writing sample early. If you wait until the night before your application is due, you will not have sufficient time to think about or edit your piece.
 - **Consider Application Timelines:** The application timelines for both law firms and other employment opportunities have moved up drastically in recent years. Therefore, it is important to start the process of revising and preparing your writing sample early. Check your application deadlines ahead of time and plan to give yourself a few weeks to revise your application materials, including your writing sample. Consider making an appointment with the Writing Center in advance so that you can be as prepared as possible for your application deadlines.

¹ This handout is a compilation of several former handouts, some of which were written and revised by Hillary Coyne, Kristen Murray, Elizabeth Glasgow, Adam Briggs, Elizabeth Connelly, Lauren Dolecki and Celia Belmonte. This current version was compiled and revised by Satya Khurana and Professor Frances DeLaurentis in 2026.

- **Take Advantage of Your Refined Writing Skills:** The more time you devote to revising your writing sample, the more you can take advantage of the fact that you are now more skilled at legal writing than you were when you wrote the paper.
- **Take Advantage of the Time You Have:** If you have sufficient time, you should focus on the analysis, the organization *and* the details. In terms of organization, you can reconsider your large-scale organization, small-scale organization and topic sentences.
- **Above All, Proofread:** On the other hand, if you are pressed for time, make sure to at least read the piece for any grammatical, spelling, typographical or citation (Bluebook) errors. Those mistakes will be particularly noticeable to an employer and are easy to fix. And, in the age of A.I., those small mistakes are even easier to catch. Because of this, you may also want to ask someone else to proofread it for you. You may also consider using a grammar, spell-checking or proofreading tool to do a final proof (after you have proofed it yourself).

3. Strengthen Analysis and Organization: You want to make sure that your writing sample outlines the law for your reader. You are the expert on the topic, and therefore the law, in your writing sample. Do not assume that prospective employers have knowledge of the law or topic in your writing sample. As the writer, you are the one presenting the law to the employer.

- **Consider Using Roadmaps:** Roadmaps are an effective way to present both the law and your conclusions to readers. If you use roadmaps, be sure that your analysis then follows those roadmaps. For example, if you introduce two topics in a roadmap, your analysis should discuss those topics in the order introduced.
- **Consider Using Pointheadings:** As you likely learned in Legal Practice, pointheadings are an effective way to state your conclusions for each section (and subsection) and preview your analysis.
- **Clearly Spell Out Analysis:** Be sure to spell out your analysis for the reader as explicitly as possible. A main reason that employers ask for writing samples is to determine whether students are capable of legal reasoning. Take this opportunity to demonstrate your extensive analytical skills to prospective employers. Strive to rely on varied forms of legal reasoning, such as rule-based, analogical and policy-based reasoning. Remember that the reader should not have to fill in the blanks to understand how you reached your conclusions.
- **Consider Annotating Your Discussion:** One way to check the thoroughness of your analysis is to try to annotate your discussion. Ask yourself if you can identify where you state rules, explain the law if necessary and apply the law. Can you actually identify the type of legal reasoning you use to apply the law to the facts? As you read, also consider whether there are any gaps in your reasoning or any places where you find yourself questioning the usefulness of specific facts, rules or analogies that

you have included. If you find yourself asking “why” at any point, that may be a sign that revisions are needed.

- **Consider Creating a Reader-Based Outline:** One method for testing the organization of your analysis is to create a reader-based outline consisting of your topic sentences. You can copy and paste your topic sentences into another document. (Alternatively, you can write a one or two-word description of the paragraph based on that topic sentence and compile those short descriptions into an outline.) This reader-based outline simulates how your reader sees your document. By looking at the reader-based outline, you can identify if your topic sentences fail to guide your reader or identify the substance of your analysis.
- Check out “[Top 5 Things You Need to Know About Writing Samples](#)” for more tips on strengthening the analysis of your writing sample.

4. Refine Topic Sentences, Pointheadings and Conclusions: Make efficient use of positions of emphasis or “power positions.”

- **Power Positions:** Topic sentences, pointheadings and conclusions are in powerful positions – the reader will always be more focused on the headings throughout your document, as well as the first and last sentences of each paragraph. Therefore, these are tools that a writer can use to easily guide a reader through an entire legal argument.
- **Clarity:** Topic sentences, pointheadings and conclusions that clearly summarize your argument are particularly important for a writing sample. Readers may skim the document, reading your topic sentences, pointheadings and conclusions only. Additionally, for a reader who is unfamiliar with the writing sample’s subject or the law it covers, topic sentences, pointheadings and mini conclusions help guide the reader.

5. Redact: If you are using a piece of writing that you wrote for a past employer (such as a brief or memo you wrote during a previous job, externship or internship) as your writing sample, you will most likely have to redact (remove) certain types of information from the piece as you revise it. To do so, consider following these steps:

- **Contact Past Employer:** First, you will want to contact your past employer and ask for their permission to use the piece of writing as your writing sample. You will also need to ask them if there is any specific information in the piece that they want you to redact (remove).
- **Identify What to Redact:** Information that may need to be redacted includes:
 - Background information relevant to the specific matter or case discussed in your writing sample;
 - Your past employer’s information (name, office, address, position, etc.);
 - Information regarding your past employer’s clients (both explicit references, as well as any descriptions that would enable a reader to identify the clients, such as their job titles); and

- Any other sensitive or confidential information that should not be disclosed to a wide audience, including any other information that your past employer has asked you to redact.
 - **Start Redacting:** When redacting, consider the needs of the prospective employer – the person who will read, and will therefore need to understand, your redacted writing sample.
 - Redacting by placing black boxes over the confidential information will be distracting for your reader. Instead, consider replacing sensitive information with fictitious terms such as Mr. Smith, “Plaintiff,” Jones, Inc., etc. You can identify where you have replaced sensitive information with fictitious terms on your cover page, as discussed below.
 - If too much of the piece has to be redacted, the essence of your writing could be lost, which would defeat the purpose of the writing sample. If so, you may want to think carefully about whether or not another piece of writing, which does not require any (or as much) redacting, may better serve as a writing sample.
 - When you are finished revising and preparing your writing sample, be sure to copy and paste your writing sample into a new Word document and then save it in PDF format. Doing this will ensure that all metadata (hidden data and personal information) is cleared from the document. When you paste your writing sample into a new Word document, however, proof the new document to ensure that all your formatting was successfully copied over.
 - **Show Redacted Document to Past Employer:** Once you have redacted confidential information from your writing sample, give your past employer the opportunity to review the redacted document. Ask your past employer if you have redacted all the necessary information and if there are any other changes that you need to make. Then, double check with them that you can use the document as your writing sample.
 - **Inform Prospective Employer:** If you have received permission from your past employer to use a redacted document as your writing sample, you must ensure that prospective employers know that certain information has been redacted from your writing sample. To do so, include a statement on your cover page that notes that names and places have been changed. Additionally, state that you have permission to use the document in a prominent location on your cover page.
6. **Details and Proofreading:** Be sure that you devote plenty of time to thoroughly proofread your writing sample.
- **Proofread (Multiple Times!):** Read your document over carefully to see if there are any grammatical, spelling, typographical or citation errors. This review will likely take more time than you think. Consider reading the document multiple times, dedicating each read-through to one type of error – once for grammatical errors, once for spelling errors, once for typographical errors and then once again for citation errors.

- **Consider Different Proofreading Techniques:** Consider reading the document out loud or printing it out and reading it on paper rather than from a computer screen. You may be able to catch more errors by doing one (or both) of these exercises.
- **Remember, lawyers are picky!** If you are applying for jobs that draw many applicants, prospective employers may just scan your writing sample. A grammatical error or spelling mistake will stand out far more than a good case comparison and could prevent you from getting the job. How does the writing sample sound after a thorough read? It is often the little things that count the most and make the strongest impression.
- **Formatting:** Remember to save your document in PDF format to ensure that no unwanted modifications or changes occur to your formatting upon submission.

7. Modifications and Cover Page: Above all, your writing sample should show readers that you are a strong writer. However, that's not all it should do – you also want to make sure that actually reading your writing sample is an easy experience for readers. An applicant who follows a prospective employer's formatting instructions and provides the employer with a cover page will stand out. Remember, lawyers are busy people! If you make their lives easier by giving them a nice, neat cover page that gives them a brief but thorough overview of what they are reading, they will look favorably at your application. If you do not, they may be frustrated having to take time out of their busy schedules to figure out what you are writing about.

- **Modifications:** Be sure to follow any specific instructions that a prospective employer has provided. Additionally, keep the following in mind:
 - **Modify to Meet Page Limits:** If a prospective employer asks for a 10-page writing sample, but your piece of writing is originally 12 pages, you will need to remove or condense parts of your writing sample to meet the prospective employer's application requirements.
 - **Do NOT** cut the last two pages of your 12-page document and submit a writing sample that abruptly ends on the tenth page.
 - There are many options for what you can remove from a piece of writing. Consider removing the Table of Authorities and/or the Table of Contents (but always check that these are not explicitly required by a prospective employer before removing them). If you analyzed two issues, you can remove the weaker of the two issues. If you remove the discussion of one issue, make sure that you remove the issue statement corresponding to that issue. You can also consider revising the Statement of Facts to address only the facts relevant to the one issue you keep.

Alternatively, you may want to remove the Statement of Facts and instead summarize the facts in your cover page.

- Proofread the document to make sure your revisions did not create problems that did not exist in the original document. For example, if you decide to cut the first issue, be sure that a legal test relevant to both issues, which may be described in the first issue, is moved to the beginning of the second issue that you keep. Additionally, as you revise, you may delete the full citation to a case such that only short citations remain later in the document. If that happens, make sure there is a full citation to that case the first time you reference it in your revised document.
- **Cover Page:** A writing sample cover page is **not** the same thing as a cover letter. A cover page is simply a one-page document that becomes the first page of your writing sample. The cover page should include the following key factual information about the writing sample so that prospective employers understand what they are reading:
 - **Heading:** Your heading should include your name, address, telephone number and email address. Remember that whatever heading you put on your writing sample should be the same heading (same font, size, color, etc.) that you put on your resume and cover letter.
 - **Source:** It is helpful for the reader to know when and why your writing sample was originally produced. It may have been produced during your Legal Practice class, an upper-level seminar, a summer job or an internship. The reader can better evaluate your writing if they know when, for whom and why the piece was originally written.
 - **Prompt, Assignment and Background Information:** Include a short, one-sentence description of the prompt or assignment you were given for the original piece of writing. You may want to include some background information on the cover page if, for example, your professor purposely narrowed the scope of your assignment. You can explain on your cover page that certain legal issues were conceded and are therefore not included in your writing sample. If the piece was submitted as an exam, you should note that on your cover page, as well.
 - **Redactions:** Remember, if you are using a writing sample in which you redacted certain confidential information, include a statement on your cover page noting that names and places have been changed. State that you have permission from your past employer to use the document in a prominent location on the cover page.
 - **Note Modifications Made to Meet Page Limit:** If you have modified your writing sample to meet a prospective employer's

page limit, indicate on your cover page what you have removed or condensed in the document.

- **Honesty:** Be honest in your description. For example, only indicate that your writing sample is unedited by others if that is truly the case.
- **Sample:** See below for a sample cover page. You can also use [this sample cover page provided by Georgetown Law's Office of Career Strategy](#).

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WRITING SAMPLE

The attached writing sample is an appellate brief I drafted this spring for my Legal Practice: Writing and Analysis course. The appellate brief assignment entailed analyzing a fact pattern involving a short, possibly intrusive, police stop of Mr. Tom White and arguing whether White's Fourth Amendment rights were violated.

This 10-page writing sample begins with the "Table of Contents" and does not include the "Table of Authorities" found in the original appellate brief. The "Table of Authorities" has been omitted in this submission to reduce the sample's length.

8. **Get a Second Opinion:** In addition to reviewing your piece of writing yourself, get an unfamiliar reader to read through your writing sample and give you feedback. You can ask a friend or mentor to review your writing sample. You can also make an appointment with a Senior Writing Fellow in the Georgetown Law Writing Center.
 - When you get a second opinion, tell the reader whom your intended audience is so that they can put themselves in that mindset. Often, wording that makes sense to you might confuse a reader who is less familiar with the subject matter or law.
 - Do not feel obligated to take every suggestion offered to you. However, consider that your reader's thoughts or concerns are likely to be shared by a prospective employer.
9. **Review Before Interview:** Do not underestimate the possibility that a prospective employer may ask you to summarize your writing sample during an interview.
 - As you revise and prepare your writing sample, consider how you may explain your writing sample to an employer in a few sentences.

- Think about possible questions employers may ask about your writing sample, and how you may answer them.
- Most importantly, if it has been a long time since you last reviewed your writing sample, reread it before your next interview.