

Writing Samples

When you are applying for a job, employers may request a writing sample. Writing samples allow employers to get a sense of the quality of your writing, communication skills, and research abilities. Ideally, you would use something you wrote for a job or something that was published, but often undergraduates do not have either of these. Instead, you would submit a paper you wrote for a class.

What kinds of organizations want them?

Employers in any field may request a writing sample, but writing samples are most commonly requested in the fields of publishing, public relations, advertising, media, research, politics, law, and higher education.

Guidelines for writing and supplying writing samples – Key Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Use employer-provided guidelines. If none are provided, try to make the topic of your writing sample relevant to the field or position for which you are applying. However, the quality of the piece you submit is more important than the topic. This should be an example of your best writing.
- When submitting more than one sample, use pieces on a variety of topics.
- Make sure that your writing sample is free of typos and grammatical, punctuation and word usage errors, like all other documentation that you send to potential employers.
- Keep it brief. No one wants to read 20 pages. Two to five pages is a suitable length- it's short enough to keep someone's attention and long enough to give them a good idea of your skills. TIP: Do not rely on spell-check alone!
- Think about how you want to present your writing samples: font, page structure, heading, etc. While there is no standard format for writing samples, you want your work to look professional.
- Make an appointment with a faculty member to go over your writing sample. They can help you eliminate structural problems and make it more appealing to employers.

Don'ts:

- Don't send a writing sample unless the employer specifically asks for one. That being said, it is a good idea to have a writing sample prepared in case the employer requests one.
- Don't use a creative writing piece as your writing sample. This may be an example of good writing but it does not typically help the employer to see the skills that they want to identify in a potential employee. Also, creative writing is rarely called for in the workplace.
- Don't submit your writing samples in a binder. Binders are bulky and hard to stack.

Other Information

- Organizations will often request samples of the type of writing that you would do as an intern.
- While political internships require only one or two writing samples, internships in journalism usually require more, perhaps 5-10. These are sometimes referred to as "clips". Journalism internships require published work. One media internship asked for an example of a blog post.
- Journalism internships will often ask for published pieces. These can be pieces published in a school newspaper like the *Tower*.
- For full-time employment in journalism, you want to have a portfolio of clips and writing samples.
- If the writing sample is from a previous job, make sure not to violate confidentiality by using client's names. Also, ensure that any reports that you wrote at previous jobs are not the organization's exclusive property and/or violate confidentiality expectations.
- Writing samples from group projects are usually not a good idea, as you need to use a piece that you worked on alone. Writing samples must be an example of your own work.

