

Writing Samples

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Office Hours: M-F, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. | Drop-in Hours: M-F, 2 to 4 p.m.



Alumni &
Career Services

When do you need a writing sample?

Potential employers may occasionally ask for a writing sample to be included with the cover letter and resume, typically for jobs in research, the media, or advertising and public relations. Writing samples give the employer insight into your written communication skills.

How long should it be?

Unless otherwise specified by the employer, choose a writing sample that is two to five pages in length. If you wish to use a longer piece of writing, extract a two to five page section of the larger work and introduce it with a paragraph which puts the selection in context (i.e. explain what the larger work is about and how the section you have provided fits into that larger work).

How should you choose your sample?

Quality: This should always be your first consideration, before any criteria that follow below. Choose a piece that you feel is well written. Check for spelling, typographical, or grammatical errors. Have someone else read and edit your piece. It always helps to get a different perspective.

Writing Style: This is almost as important as the quality of the writing. For virtually any job, choose a piece which reflects the elements of good professional writing:

- Based in reality and concrete terminology (versus abstractions).
- Concise, conveying meaning in as few words as possible.
- Does not require the reader to have any special knowledge of your topic.

Topic/Method Analysis: If you have written something that relates to the job in some way (be it content or the manner of analysis) and it is of good quality, choose that piece as your sample. Employers want to know how you will write if you are placed in that job; thus, try to stick to that field. For example, if you are applying to a job in journalism you may want to submit something you wrote for the campus newspaper; if you are applying to a management or business analyst position, a case study from a business-related course would serve as a good writing sample. A research paper (or excerpt of one) would be a good choice for virtually any research-oriented position.

Special Cases:

- Journalism and advertising often require a “portfolio,” a specialized collection of writing samples. A career advisor can provide you with publications that show you how to produce these.
- Public relations firms may want to see samples of press releases you have written, even if you need to make them up.
- Using “creative” samples to convey your ability to think creatively can be important in certain fields. Even in “creative” fields, such as advertising or television, employers want to know that you can convey ideas clearly and succinctly. Seek advice from a career advisor before submitting a creative piece as a sample.