



Completing Your Applications: Preparing Writing Samples, Reference and Transcripts

OFFICE OF CAREER PLANNING

1100 Jeffries Hall
701 South State St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
734.764.0546
lawcareers@umich.edu
www.law.umich.edu/careers

Introduction

In addition to a well-written resume and cover letter, a complete application may include a writing sample, letters of recommendation or a list of references, and a transcript. Be sure to read each job posting carefully to determine what documents the employer is requesting. **Note:** Although a sample of legal writing is sometimes requested to accompany your resume and cover letter, you should remember that employers will be treating all written materials submitted for a job application as examples of your writing ability. As such, all application materials should be as well-written as possible.

Writing Samples

Selecting Your Writing Sample

Your writing sample should be a practical piece of persuasive or analytic legal writing similar to the assignments you will be completing as a junior attorney or as a summer intern. This usually means a brief or a memo, although a bench memorandum written for a judge can also make a fantastic writing sample.

Law review articles, while impressive, will not help an employer grasp what you are capable of producing on a daily basis. While you should absolutely list them (along with relevant non-legal publications) on your resume, do not submit one as your primary writing sample.

Your writing sample should also be:

- Typically **relevant** and **appropriate**. Avoid extremely narrow, arcane, or shocking subject matters, unless they would be of particular interest to the employer.
- Substantially **your own work** and not extensively peer-reviewed. Use your judgment here—it is fine to ask a few friends or your Legal Practice professor for help proofreading and editing your writing sample, but if portions of the document were written by someone else, either redact them or find a new writing sample.
- Between **5 and 10 pages** in length (unless otherwise specified).
- **Recently written**. Your legal writing skills should be improving throughout law school, so by the time you are a 3L, your 1L Legal Practice memo will be stale. Avoid using an outdated sample by staying on the lookout for opportunities to showcase the growth in your writing skills.

Preparing Your Writing Sample for Submission

Now that you've selected the perfect writing sample, follow these tips to ensure it is polished and ready to send to any prospective employer:

- Be sure to **edit** and **proofread** your writing sample! Even though your writing sample will be something you've already submitted to a professor or an employer for review, it is still important to give it a second look to catch any remaining grammatical or spelling errors and to clean up awkward syntax or disconnected arguments (especially if some time has passed since you wrote it).
- **Get permission!** If your writing sample is something you prepared for an employer, be sure to get explicit permission before using it unless it was publicly filed with the court.
- **Redact confidential information.** For documents not publicly filed, remove any client names, locations, or other identifying information, and replace them with fictitious placeholders. Your employer will likely help you identify any information that should be kept confidential. If using a publicly filed document, remove any information redacted in the version available to the public.
- **Redact anything not written by you.** Again, remove any portion of your brief written by another attorney as well as any "boilerplate" language you only slightly adapted.
- **Include a cover sheet** with your writing sample explaining:
 - What the writing sample is and in what context it was drafted (e.g., "a memo written for my Legal Practice class...").
 - That the sample is your work (and whether anything written by another person has been redacted).
 - Whether you were asked to take a specific position.
 - Whether the laws you could reference were limited in any way.
 - That you have permission to use it (if needed).
 - Whether anything has been redacted or changed due to confidentiality.
- Finally, be sure to **include your name and a page number** on each page of your writing sample!

References and Letters of Recommendation

References

When you are on the job hunt, it is a good idea to have 3-4 professional references in mind as many employers will request them at some point in the application/interview process. References are individuals who agree to be contacted by prospective employers to discuss your qualifications. Students will usually ask former employers (especially legal employers, if applicable) as well as professors with whom they are close to serve as references. It is a good idea to speak to these

individuals prior to listing them as references to be sure they will say positive things about your candidacy. Additionally, be sure to provide your references with an updated resume and a description of the work you did for him or her to provide some context.

When formatting your list of references, it is helpful to mimic the layout of your resume by using the same letterhead and font. Include the following information for each of your references:

- Name
- Title
- Company
- Relationship to you
- Phone number
- Email address

James Halpert
1600 Washtenaw Avenue, Apt. #124, Ann Arbor, MI 48109
(734) 764-0546 • jimh@umich.edu

Professional References

Michael Scott
Regional Manager, Dunder Mifflin
Former Supervisor
(570) 555-5000
mscott@dunder.com

Letters of Recommendation

Some legal employers will ask for letters of recommendation rather than references, although this is very rare for law firms, especially in the EIW process. As with references, it is best to ask legal employers or law school professors who know you well enough to speak to your talents with some level of specificity. Again, be sure to provide your recommender with some background information and your application materials. Some recommenders may ask you to draft your own letter. This can be a great opportunity, so don't be shy about taking advantage of it! If you have any questions or would like a sample, contact our office. Additionally, please contact our office to speak to a counselor if you are thinking about including a letter of reference where one has not been specifically requested by the employer.

You may choose to keep your letters of recommendation on file with our office by filling out the [Letter of Recommendation Form](#), giving it to your recommender, and asking that the form and completed letter be emailed to us at lawcareers@umich.edu. Keeping your letter on file is optional but has a couple of advantages: 1) your recommenders will be relieved of the task of writing an individual letter

for each employer, and 2) the letters will remain in your permanent OCP file for future use. We will forward copies of your letters to prospective employers at your [written request](#).

Transcripts

Unofficial Transcripts

Most employers will request a copy of your transcript during the application/interviewing process. An unofficial copy will usually satisfy this requirement. The easiest way to produce an unofficial copy of your transcript is to copy your grades from Wolverine Access then paste them into a Word document. Be sure to include your name on the document and correct any formatting issues.

KIMBERLY SCHMIDT - UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT								
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN - ANN ARBOR								
Fall 2012		Law		GRADE	HOURS	MSH	CTP	MHP
LAW	510	Civil Procedure		B+	4.00	4.00	4.00	13.20
LAW	530	Criminal Law		B+	4.00	4.00	4.00	13.20
LAW	580	Torts		B	4.00	4.00	4.00	12.00
LAW	590	Legal Practice I		S	2.00	0.00	2.00	0.00
Term Total			GPA: 3.2		14.00	12.00	14.00	

Official Transcripts

If you need an official transcript, you can order or download a copy online through Wolverine Access, via U.S. mail, or in person at a University Student Services location. For more information, see the Office of Student Records' [website](#).

If you are having difficulty uploading your official transcript to Symplicity due to its size, email it to us at lawcareers@umich.edu and we will try our best to shrink it for you!