

HOW TO SUCCEED AT WRITING SAMPLES

Has creating a writing sample left you feeling stressed and overwhelmed?



Do you feel like every attempt isn't quite up to par?



Is your room swarming with draft after draft of unfinished papers?



Then you have come to the “write” place!! The Career Center’s Guide to Writing Samples is the answer you have been looking for. Read on for writing tips and techniques, ideas of what to do and what not to do, and lists of helpful resources.

1. Why Do I Need to Create A Writing Sample?

For some fields, such as communications and journalism, it is a given that in order to be hired by an organization or accepted into a graduate program you will need to submit several high-quality writing samples. However, if you are not entering such a field you may wonder why you need to create a writing sample in the first place. The answer is simple. In almost any profession, workers use their writing skills daily. Some examples of this include sending an email, drafting a report, applying for a grant, or submitting an article to a publication. As such, strong written communication skills are highly sought after by most employers.

2. Choosing Your Topic

What you write about is as important as how you write. Your topic will offer the reader a glimpse into your personality, beliefs, interests, and/or ideas. Be sure to take the time needed to choose a writing topic; this isn't a decision to be taken lightly.

Consider the field and the audience. Your writing sample should be **relevant** to the position for which you are applying. Do not, for example, submit a paper about welfare reform to an art gallery that is advertising for a curator position. A more appropriate topic would be something that is related to the field; for example, your personal experiences with museum work, or your views on the future of art galleries in America. Keep in mind *who* will be reading your writing sample, and gear your paper towards their profession or field of interest.

You do not necessarily need to create a writing sample from scratch. It may be possible to use something you have already written, as long as it is appropriate to the field and meets all the requirements set forth in the writing sample assignment. Some examples of past work that may be suitable include class essays, published articles, blog entries, case studies, and projects from a past work experience (just be sure that you have your supervisor's permission before submitting a writing sample from a work experience).

3. Editing

Your writing sample must be free from all spelling and grammatical errors. Be sure to edit your work to ensure that your document is as perfect as possible before submitting it to a graduate school or employer.

Editing tips:

- After you are finished with your sample, put it down for several hours. When you return to do your edits your head will be clearer and it will be easier to see any errors.
- Print out your document. Some errors are easier to see on a hard copy of the document, plus reading this way can be easier on your eyes.
- Enlist some friends to help with your edits. Better yet – make an appointment with a Career Center Representative. We are happy to assist you!
- Another excellent resource on campus is the Writing Center. Learn more at www.dickinson.edu/academics/resources/writingprogram/content/Writing-Center/.

Start your editing now! This guide contains five critical writing errors. Can you find them! Answers are listed below.

4. What Not To Do

- **Conversational style** - The writing style that you use when sending an email or updating your Facebook status is not the same writing style that you should use when writing a more formal paper, such as your writing sample.
- **Errors** – There is no room for any errors when creating a writing sample. The key to this is effective editing. Read section 3 above for some helpful editing tips.
- **Plagiarism** – While this may seem obvious to some, it bears mentioning. Copying another’s work is NEVER acceptable. Plagiarizing is a surefire way to get yourself removed from consideration for a job or graduate school program.
- **Controversy** - Your writing sample is not the time to be controversial or avant-garde. While you can certainly state your well-thought out opinions and the reasoning behind them, steer clear from topics that can be construed as dissonant in nature. You want your writing sample to assist you in your job or graduate school hunt, not hinder you.
- **Overly creative** - Now is also not a good time to showcase your creativity. Poems, jokes, artwork, etc. have no place in your writing sample.
- **Too long** – Unless otherwise noted, your writing sample should only be two to four pages long.

- **Confidential Info** - Be sure to block out any confidential information in your writing sample. For example, if you are applying for a position as a social worker and are submitting a case study as your writing sample, do not include the client's name or any other identifying information in your document.
- **Forget your name - Yes**, this actually happens. Sometimes an applicant gets so caught up in creating the writing sample that he forgets to add his name.

Errors:

1. Ending a sentence with a preposition (*The Career Center's Guide to Writing Samples is the answer you have been looking for.*)
2. Choosing the wrong punctuation. (*Can you find them!*)
3. Using a contraction (*Be sure to take the time needed to choose a writing topic; this isn't a decision to be taken lightly.*)
4. Misspelling a word (*submiting*)
5. Using gender-biased pronouns (*he forgets to add his name*)