



WRITING SAMPLES: DOS AND DON'TS

When applying for an internship, job, fellowship, or graduate school program, you may be asked to submit a writing sample. Implement the tips below to ensure your writing sample exceeds expectations.

What is it?

A writing sample allows the reviewer to assess your ability to communicate in written form in a concise manner, as well as your analytical abilities. Not all industries request writing samples during the application process. Positions or programs that require a lot of reading comprehension, editing, or writing may be particularly interested in gauging your writing skills before extending an interview or offer.

The basics:

- Usually 3-5 pages are requested, but follow the application guidelines on length, if applicable.
- Don't submit a writing sample if it is not requested. Consider adding a link on your resume or LinkedIn profile to your professional writings.
- Writing samples should be pulled from your existing work (i.e. academic coursework, research experience).

When selecting a writing sample to submit:

DO...

- select a piece of writing that is relevant for the position, if possible. For example, a research paper or literature review is a good choice for a research assistantship or graduate school application.
- make sure your writing is clear and concise, and contains no errors.
- turn in a recent writing sample. You want to showcase your current writing abilities.
- make sure that you protect any confidential information, particularly in writing samples that include health or legal information about an individual.
- submit a writing sample where you were the primary or only author. If there are several authors on the paper, the reader won't know which parts you wrote, which means your individual skills and abilities won't be highlighted.

DON'T...

- turn in a writing sample that discusses a "hot button" item (e.g. political or moral debate).
- select a writing that contradicts the mission statement or aims of the organization you are applying for. For example, it wouldn't be a good idea to turn in an essay you wrote in support of a candidate from one political party while applying for an internship with a candidate from the opposing party.
- submit a writing sample that has not been reviewed by someone else, or that received a poor grade from an instructor.
- choose a really long writing sample – a few pages is enough to showcase your writing abilities. Take an excerpt if needed.

Resources:

Need help selecting or reviewing a writing sample before submitting it to the reviewer? There are many on-campus and online resources to help you!

- [The Writing Center](#)- Offers in-person and online appointments for undergraduate students who want assistance or feedback on written work. UMD graduate students can request writing consultations from the [Graduate School Writing Center](#).
- [Terrapins Connect](#)- Allows students to connect with alumni in the field/industry of interest to request information and feedback about applications (writing samples included!), interviews, the field, etc.
- Instructors/Faculty- Are great resources of information and in some situations can offer industry specific feedback on your chosen writing sample as well as your writing skills.