

Writing Samples

You might be asked to provide writing samples as part of your job or internship application process. A writing sample demonstrates how you organize and express your thoughts. Your goal is to convince an employer that you can create the kind of written materials and handle the type of work expected of an employee in the position for which you are applying. A writing sample is common for positions in media, law, or research assistant roles in a variety of industries.

Choose samples that demonstrate the type of writing you would do on the job.

If possible, select samples that match the genre of the writing that the position would involve. For example, if you are applying for journalism positions, submit “clips”—actual articles that have been published in a campus newspaper, blog, or other publication.

Submit your best writing.

If you are deciding between two papers you have written, and one is better written than the other but your weaker paper is topically more relevant, then submit the paper that is better written. You may alternatively choose to rewrite the relevant paper to be stronger before you submit it. Remember, the employer is assessing your writing skills; being topically relevant is just an added bonus.

Provide excerpts if your samples are long.

Most employers will specify how many pages or how many clips they want. If they don't, follow up and ask. If you're still not able to get this information, then submit 2–5 pages of writing, usually double-spaced (unless it is a clip). This can be a combination of one or more writing samples. If you want to use a paper that is longer than five pages, provide an excerpt with a notation at the top that tells the employer that it is an excerpt and where in the paper this excerpt is from. You might share the introduction, sections of the body, and your conclusion, so the reader is still able to follow your thought process.

Polish your writing samples.

Make sure to send in papers that do not have your professor's comments. Provide clean copies of your writing and revise them as necessary. Proofread your document to avoid errors or typos.

Create an Effective Online Presence

According to a 2015 survey conducted by Jobvite, a recruiting platform, 96% of recruiters use social media in the recruiting process. Google yourself and review the results (both images and text) carefully. Make sure you are comfortable with employers seeing what's public about you online. Ask yourself—is this everything you want them to see? If not, this is where social media can help.

Employers are looking online to gauge communication skills, professional demeanor, well-roundedness, and your other skills and assets. One of the most essential skills for the 21st-century job seeker is an understanding of how to strategically use social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram, and digital assets such as personal websites/portfolios and blogs, to build your professional brand.

Social media can first be used as a research tool to follow people and companies, and to learn more about the culture or work of different organizations. When you're ready, you can also connect with professionals and use social media to establish your credibility, promote yourself, and demonstrate your skills, values, and professionalism. Tweeting, blogging, and commenting on LinkedIn articles and posts about industry-specific news can build your online credibility. When employers search for you, they will find an informed individual who demonstrates an interest in the field. You should maintain this online presence, update it, and continue to build it.



LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a network of professionals who connect according to common interests, which may include industry, geography, specialities, career goals, and more. Your LinkedIn presence conveys the same information as a resume and allows you to tap into your invisible network, which can help you in your job search. You can also join groups on LinkedIn around shared interests. After joining groups, you can post answers to questions or start discussion topics. This can make you more noticeable to recruiters, increase your expertise, and show your interest in a specific area. LinkedIn groups include Columbia Career Connections, Columbia Alumni Association Network, and IvyLife. See pages 81–82 for information about creating a profile and connecting with professionals.



Twitter

Twitter can provide an ever-expanding circle of contacts that you can use to help you search for a job, share resources, or broaden your network. You can follow people you admire, follow companies, or learn about openings through job-sharing accounts. Additionally, employers looking for social-media savvy candidates often tweet jobs to their followers.



Instagram

Instagram is a great way to build a visual brand, connect with and follow other professionals, and share upcoming events, releases, or news. If your work is something that produces a tangible product, then it can be a great space to showcase what you have to offer. Even if your work doesn't result in a physical ware, Instagram is a channel where you can build your professional brand by connecting with possible clients and with your industry's community, and sharing your professional ideology. Check out some of the people in your field that you most respect and see how and if Instagram is utilized in your industry or field.

Blogging

Use a blog to establish credibility, particularly for industries like public relations, marketing, publishing, and journalism. To blog effectively, refine your experiences, skills, and perspectives into a coherent idea that can contribute to your industry of interest in a way that other blogs do not. Many blog-hosting services are free and offer a variety of templates and arrangements to provide you with a great design. Blogging 2–4 times a week is enough to establish your professional identity, and you can always ask other professionals or classmates to guest blog. Referencing and linking to other bloggers, joining blogging groups, and submitting yourself for review and awards all share your name and demonstrate your professional capability.

Online Portfolio/Personal Website

It is a good idea for artists, writers, doctoral candidates, architects, and any students looking to enter media or a creative field to establish an online portfolio or personal website to display their work. Maintaining an up-to-date online portfolio is a great way to keep track of your accomplishments, ensure your visibility on the web, and manage your online identity. There are a number of platforms to choose from. Columbia provides web hosting space to members of the university community, which you can learn more about by visiting the website of Columbia University Information Technology and clicking on the Web Publishing link. Alternatively, you can use a free blogging platform, such as Wordpress or Blogger, or a more design-oriented platform intended for creative professionals and visual artists, such as Behance or Dribbble, which may have small monthly or yearly fees. Students pursuing a career in computer science often create a portfolio of technical projects on Github. If you're interested in creating a professional website, free website builders such as Wix and Squarespace are great places to start. Whichever platform you choose, make sure to update your portfolio regularly and include your web address in both your resume and LinkedIn profile.

Introduction to Interviewing

Why the Employer Wants to Interview You

When an employer determines, through reviewing your resume and cover letter, that you have the necessary skills and experience to succeed in their organization, they will invite you for an interview. The interview is designed to closely evaluate your skills, experience, and motivation to determine whether you are a good fit for the organization. Interviewing is the most personal part of the job search process because it involves assessing whether you will mesh well with a company's culture. Fit can be measured by evaluating your interpersonal skills, interests, and general presentation. With research and proper preparation, you can demonstrate why you are the right candidate for the position.

Your Chance to Interview the Employer

While an interview is typically viewed as an evaluation of the candidate, you should also consider it a crucial opportunity for you to evaluate the employer. Though you can gather a great deal of information through secondary research, there are many aspects of a job and an organization that you can only discover by speaking with the employer and observing the environment. Before your interview, identify what questions you need answered in order to determine if this is the right position for you. At the end of the interview, you can ask questions about the role, division, organization, industry, etc. (see page 64 for a sample list of questions) and, throughout the interview, observe the people and office space to get a sense of the culture.