

## Ten Tips for Summer Writing Success

1. **Relax.** Attorneys spend decades refining their writing skills. Everyone at your firm understands that writing is hard, and that you've had few opportunities to draft the documents you'll be asked to generate. Your efforts will be appreciated.
2. **Don't relax too much.** When reviewing exams or even papers, law professors often overlook typos, citation errors, spelling mistakes, and formatting gaffes. Law firms are much less forgiving. Never let sloppy mistakes mar your work product.
3. **Know where you're headed.** After you meet with assigning attorneys, email them a summary of the assignment (what you think you're expected to accomplish and how many hours you should spend). Attorneys often spot misunderstandings only after they see them in writing.
4. **Hunt for context.** You may find that you don't fully understand how your assignment fits into "the big picture." Consult the assigning attorney or another attorney on the matter, read the file, pull the complaint, search the Web—do what you can to understand the context of the assignment.
5. **Stay in touch.** After you've worked several hours on a major assignment, email the assigning attorney an update on where things stand. This exercise will help you organize your thoughts and keep you on track.
6. **Descend from the clouds.** Remember that the purpose of your assignments is to help the assigning attorney solve problems, plot strategy, or give advice. It is not to prove that you have a big vocabulary or a high IQ. When your work product helps resolve practical problems, attorneys will value you and your contributions.

7. **Take a stand.** When you draft a memo, distill your research into substantive points that help answer questions about the law. Avoid the “on the one hand, on the other hand” approach that characterizes many summer-associate memos. Similarly, don’t rely on the old saw that “the law is unclear.” That’s why the firm needs a memo. Use your judgment to make the law clear—or at least clearer.
8. **Read aloud.** You’ll be amazed at how often you can spot embarrassing mistakes and awkward wording when you read something aloud. A good rule of thumb: if you have trouble breathing when you read a sentence, it’s too long.
9. **Submit with confidence.** Before you submit any assignment, print it out and then pick it up as if you were the assigning attorney. Read the first few paragraphs. Have you answered the question that generated the assignment? If not, rework the draft until you’re satisfied. Also spend at least 15 minutes cutting needless words and phrases. And proofread from the last line to the first.
10. **Appreciate feedback.** When you receive feedback, keep an open mind. Many law students challenge the assigning attorney’s edits. Others become defensive or throw up their hands. *Handling criticism well can be as important as writing well in the first place.* To make the most of feedback, separate the attorney’s edits into two groups: (1) changes that are idiosyncratic or cosmetic; and (2) changes that are stylistic or substantive. Focus on the second group. List the ways the attorney refined your work so you can incorporate those strategies the next time. If you receive similar edits from several partners, add those changes to your list even if you believe they are idiosyncratic.