

A WRITING SAMPLE ABOUT WRITING SAMPLES

There Is No General Audience.

What writing samples can tell you, what they can't, and what to ask for instead.

Josh Bechtel — Human Layer Systems

THE ASK

"Can you send us some writing samples?"

A fair question. Thirty years of enterprise writing should produce a deep portfolio. The honest answer is more complicated, and the complication says something useful about the work itself.

CONTEXT

The System Behind the Sentence

Enterprise writing happens inside a system the writer did not design.

Style guides

Corporate, divisional, and product-level, often in conflict

Terminology

Approved words, forbidden words, and legally required phrasing

Voice

Leadership preferences that override any personal style

Compliance

Review cycles that reshape drafts before anyone reads them

Templates

Mandated structures that decide the shape before the words

OWNERSHIP

Who Owns the Words

The voice is the organization's

Enterprise deliverables speak for the firm, not the writer. Success means sounding like the institution, on purpose.

The documents are confidential

Runbooks, policies, briefings, and architectures stay inside the firm. The best work is precisely the work that cannot be shared.

THE FOLLOW-UP

"Just do something general."

Writing without an audience is not general. It is unmoored. Every choice depends on who is reading and why: vocabulary, structure, length, and tone. Remove the reader, and there is no basis for any of them.

THE CRAFT

Four Forces Shape Every Piece

Audience

Who reads it, and what they already know

Purpose

Decide, act, or understand

Channel

Briefing, wiki, email, or runbook

Constraints

Policy, compliance, templates, and time

A VP briefing and an operations runbook on the same topic share facts and nothing else.

DEMONSTRATION

One Message, Three Renderings

The fact: a payments platform migrates to a new provider this weekend.

FOR THE EXECUTIVE

The provider migration completes Sunday. Customer impact is projected at zero, and the rollback plan is staffed and rehearsed.

FOR OPERATIONS

Cutover begins Saturday at 22:00 ET. Freeze all payment configuration changes by 18:00 and monitor the rollback channel until sign-off.

FOR END USERS

Payments will be briefly unavailable Saturday night while we upgrade our systems. You do not need to do anything.

EVALUATION

What a Sample Can Prove

A SAMPLE SHOWS

Mechanics and command of grammar

Clarity at the sentence level

Structure and information order

A SAMPLE CANNOT SHOW

Adaptability across audiences

Judgment inside real constraints

How the writer works with reviewers

RECOMMENDATION

The Better Ask

1 Give a short brief

Name an audience, a purpose, and a length. Twenty minutes of writing against a real brief reveals more than any archive.

2 Ask for a walkthrough

Have the candidate explain how they adapted one piece for two different audiences, and what changed between the versions.

This deck was written for you.

That is the point. It has a defined audience, a defined purpose, and a defined tone, which is exactly what your next writing hire should insist on.

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