

10 Questions to Ask BEFORE you start a legal-writing project:

1: What is the intended use for my draft (e.g., a client memo, a larger brief)?

—This question is key, but often gets overlooked by junior associates. If you're drafting a research memo, your tone and style will differ depending on whether it's ultimately going to the client or the court. And if it's a client-facing memo, you'll want to know whether the client is a lawyer or a businessperson. You need to know your Reader before you can write!

2: [If not clear from answer to Q1] Who are the intended readers?

3: How long should my draft be?

4: By when would you like it?

5: How much time should I bill?

6: Are there any client-specific rules for how I record my time?

—You'll want to start billing your time right away, and if you don't follow the client's rules, you'll have to redo all your entries, and the partner will NOT be pleased.

7: Can you recommend a model for this type of draft? Is there a particular format you prefer?

8: Do you have a particular writing style I should emulate? or any writing-style pet peeves I should avoid? Can you recommend a model of your writing style?

9: What will be the next step for this client (and can I help)?

10: [If you haven't worked much with this partner before] Is there a more senior associate who drafts regularly for you that I might consult with?