

Assignment Clarification

An important key to a successful externship is the ability of the supervising attorney to effectively assign legal research and writing projects. It is important to communicate your expectations and to ensure that externs have adequate opportunities to request information and discuss their progress throughout the process. Spending more time up front to clarify some of the issues below will save considerable time and effort for both you and the students. For each major assignment, we recommend that you discuss the following points with your externs.

Audience & Purpose

- For whom is the student writing? Will anyone see it but you?
- Are you using this assignment for a specific purpose (e.g., client letter, contract, etc.)?
- Have you explained how this piece fits into the overall case?

Structure & Style

- Is there a specific format you want the student to use? Do you have samples or templates to provide?
- How formal should this document be (e.g., rough draft or polished draft? Bluebook citations or not)?
 - Instruct that a rough draft should be proof read.
- Do you want copies of cases or other research materials?

Research Guidance

Strategy

- Is there a particular research strategy you want the student to use?
- Is there a starting point you would recommend?
- Are there specialized sources or materials used by your office with which the student might not be familiar?
- Is there one question on which you want the student to focus?
- Do you want an objective conclusion or do you want the student to advocate for a specific position?
- Do you want the law supporting one side of the issue or both?
- Is there relevant legislative history the student should be informed of or should research?
- What jurisdiction do you want the student to search (e.g. state law, federal law, administrative law/regulations)?

Background Information

- Is there any information on this client or matter in the office (e.g., a case file or previous research)?

Deadlines & Communication

Timing

- When do you need the assignment completed (e.g., rough draft deadline, final deadline)?
- How should the student prioritize this project relative to other assignments?
- How long should the student spend on the project (taking her level of experience into consideration)?

Communication

- How often should the student check in with you?
- How do you prefer the student communicate with you? Should they call, email, drop in?
- Who should the student reach out to if you are not available?
- Have you asked the student if he/she has questions, remembering that the student may be unfamiliar with the substantive area of law and the available resources?