

Family Law Education Reform Project

William Mitchell Letter Evaluation

OVERVIEW

This document is an evaluation for an advice letter written by students in the Writing & Representation course (first year, required course).

EXPLANATION AND COMMENTS

This evaluation may be used to assess students' performances on a practical advice letter exercise. It may be distributed to students in the form of feedback, used to grade each student's performance, or both.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Contributed by the Faculty of:
William Mitchell College of Law
St. Paul, Minnesota

The academic program at the William Mitchell College of Law is founded on legal theory and practical learning, professors who are both scholars and legal practitioners, and a student body that includes career professionals and recent college graduates.

The College of Law places an emphasis on practical lawyering skills by fusing together the curriculum and philosophy of teaching. From writing and trial advocacy program to their clinic program, the curriculum combines skills training with a focus on ethics and legal theory, preparing each student to be a powerful advocate and counselor to their clients.

Advice Letter Evaluation Sheet	WRAP Spring 2008
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William Mitchell College of Law -- Writing & Representation (first year required course)

Writing Professor: _____ Student: _____

Research notes score (up to 4 points): _____	Outline score (up to 4 points): _____	Letter score (up to 19 points): _____	Total score (up to 27 points): _____
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Heading and Introduction:

- Heading—complete and accurate
- Introduction—establishes rapport
- Presents overview
- Sets ground rules of letter (optional)

unsatisfactory	satisfactory	excellent	

Summary of Facts:

- Relevant and background (including unfavorable) facts
- Accurate, objective, and appropriately detailed
- Clear organization, e.g., chronological, topical

unsatisfactory	satisfactory	excellent	

Explanation—Research:

- Refers to binding primary authorities governing the situation
- Refers only to authorities that are still good law
- Refers to persuasive and secondary authority as needed

unsatisfactory	satisfactory	excellent	

Explanation—Analysis:

- Topics appropriately and clearly framed
- Understanding of pertinent authorities demonstrated
- Statute (if any) properly parsed to produce pertinent rule
- Cases appropriately fused to produce rule
- Rules set out simply and accurately
- Rules accurately applied to current and probable future facts
- Viable counterarguments considered
- Conclusions flowing logically from analysis

unsatisfactory	satisfactory	excellent	

(over)

Explanation—Organization:

- Topics addressed in logical order
- Clear roadmaps and transitions

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unsatisfactory satisfactory excellent

Advice:

- Brief restatement of main conclusions
- Indication of (un)certainty of analysis
- Discussion of options identified by client and you
- Discussion of advantages and disadvantages of major options
- Candid and creative suggestions

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unsatisfactory satisfactory excellent

Closing:

- Identification of what happens next
- Signature block

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unsatisfactory satisfactory excellent

Grammar, Usage, and Style:

- Responsive and professional tone
- Pitched to savvy non-lawyer
- Concise and direct presentation
- Coherently grouped paragraphs
- Easily read and coherently connected sentences
- Words chosen with precision and then consistently used
- Appropriate syntax and punctuation
- Absence of typographical errors

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unsatisfactory satisfactory excellent

DO provide citations even though in real life you probably would not do so in this type of letter:

- Sources cited in correct form
- Citations in correct places

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unsatisfactory satisfactory excellent

Format:

- Within word-count range (1200-1800 words)
- Specifies assigned scenario in subject line
- Components labeled in text of letter
- Topic or function of each paragraph labeled in margins
- Complies with assignment's other requirements
- Complies with WRAP Format Rules

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unsatisfactory satisfactory excellent