

Journal Packet

Instructions, self-assessment, prompts, and reflection standards

Purpose. Reflection turns experience into professional judgment. These journals ask you to examine what happened, why it matters in criminal practice, and what you will do with what you learned.

Submission Requirements

1. Complete four journals by the deadlines in the syllabus:
 - Journal 1 - 250 words;
 - Journals 2 and 3 - 500 words each; and
 - Journal 4 - 1,000 words.
2. Type and single-space each journal. At the top, include your name, journal number, placement, supervising attorney, and date. **Save as a PDF.**
3. Email the journal directly to me:
 - ccofer@coferluster.com
 - monroe@nwslawfirm.com
4. Your ratings and headings do not substitute for the required narrative reflection.
5. A journal is not a timesheet, case summary, or legal memorandum. Describe only enough context to support reflection.

Use the What - So What - Now What method

1. **What?** Briefly identify the task, observation, feedback, or professional question. Keep case or client facts generalized and anonymous.
2. **So what?** Analyze why it mattered. Consider law and procedure, professional role, judgment, consequences, fairness, ethics, relationships, emotions, assumptions, and feedback.
3. **Now what?** State the lesson and a concrete next step. Explain what you will repeat, change, ask, practice, research, or discuss with your supervisor.

Confidentiality and protected information

Non-negotiable. The journal is course material, not a client file. Do not assume that submitting it to me protects privilege or work product.

- Do not use names, identifying initials, cause or case numbers, exact addresses or dates, or a distinctive combination of facts that could identify a client, accused person, victim, witness, juror, or matter.
- Do not include confidential discovery, criminal-history information, protected reports, sealed or juvenile material, grand-jury information, privileged communications, nonpublic investigative or charging strategy, or information restricted by court order or placement policy.
- Do not paste or attach work product, pleadings, discovery, recordings, images, transcripts, screenshots, database results, or office records.
- Use neutral descriptions and focus on the skill, process, decision, professional role, or ethical issue. If necessary, write about the learning point without describing the underlying facts.
- Tell your supervisor that journals are required and follow all placement-specific limits. Ask the supervisor or me before submitting if you are uncertain.

How journals are reviewed

Journals are not scored like legal writing assignments, but timely and meaningful completion is required. We may give feedback in writing or in a later conversation. A journal that is below the proficient standard may be returned for revision. Two or more journals rated Poor or Needs Improvement may result in a non-passing course grade, consistent with the syllabus.

LEVEL	WHAT THE REFLECTION DOES
Poor	Mostly recites events or legal rules; does not analyze significance or identify a lesson.
Needs Improvement	Begins to analyze the experience but remains general, conclusory, or disconnected from future action.
Proficient	Uses appropriate detail, analyzes significance and challenges, connects experience to professional development, and identifies a useful next step.
Excellent	Shows candid and specific analysis, considers competing perspectives and consequences, integrates feedback or theory with practice, and forms a concrete plan for future judgment and performance.

Self-assessment scale

Use the same scale in Journal 1 and Journal 4. A higher number is not the goal by itself; candid ratings supported by examples are more useful than inflated scores.

RATING	LEVEL	WORKING DEFINITION
1	Beginning	Little or no exposure; need substantial instruction and practice.
2	Developing	Can begin the task with guidance; need more practice and feedback.
3	Satisfactory	Can perform basic work reliably with appropriate supervision.
4	Strong	Can perform competently with limited guidance and use feedback well.
5	Advanced	Can perform consistently and explain the judgment behind the work.

Criminal-practice competency worksheet

In Journal 1, enter an initial rating in the J1 column. In Journal 4, return to the same table and enter a final rating in the J4 column. Explain important changes in your narrative.

COMPETENCY	WHAT IT MEANS IN CRIMINAL PRACTICE	J1	J4
Criminal-law analysis	Identify governing substantive law and procedure, connect law to facts, and evaluate competing positions.		
Critical thinking and judgment	Question assumptions, identify missing information, weigh alternatives, and make reasoned recommendations.		
Legal research	Use efficient research strategies and select appropriate primary and secondary sources.		
Written communication	Write clearly for audience and purpose in memoranda, motions, briefs, summaries, or correspondence.		
Fact development and record review	Organize records, assess evidence, identify factual gaps, and distinguish fact from inference.		
Interviewing and listening	Prepare for and communicate respectfully and effectively with clients, witnesses, lawyers, court personnel, or agency staff.		
Counseling and explanation	Explain law, process, choices, risks, and next steps clearly and appropriately.		
Oral advocacy and presentation	Present an organized position, answer questions, and adapt to the decision-maker or audience.		
Negotiation and problem solving	Identify interests, options, constraints, and consequences in case-resolution discussions.		
Ethics and confidentiality	Recognize role-specific duties, protect information, identify conflicts or disclosure issues, and seek guidance when needed.		
Professional relationships and reliability	Work respectfully; meet deadlines; communicate status; show preparation, judgment, and attention to detail.		
Initiative and self-development	Seek appropriate work and feedback, respond constructively, monitor progress, and adjust learning goals.		

Starting Point: Skills, Role, and Goals

Minimum length: 250 words plus the completed J1 ratings

Part A - Initial self-assessment

1. Complete the J1 column in the competency worksheet using the 1-5 scale.
2. Choose three competencies to develop intentionally. For each one, explain why it matters to your placement, what work may provide practice, what feedback you will seek, and how you will recognize progress.
3. Connect those three competencies to your signed learning-plan goals. If they do not align, explain what you will revise or discuss with your supervisor.

Part B - Initial reflection

Using What - So What - Now What, reflect on your entry into the placement.

Address:

- Your role and the criminal-justice setting in which you are working, described without identifying a matter or person;
- Your supervisor's expectations, feedback style, and standards for work product, communication, deadlines, and confidentiality;
- One early observation about how a criminal matter moves through the system or how legal professionals exercise judgment;
- An assumption or concern you brought into the placement and whether the experience has begun to confirm, complicate, or change it; and
- One concrete action you will take before Journal 2.

Midterm: Process, Judgment, and Feedback

Minimum length: 500 words

Part A - Analyze one experience

Choose one generalized task or observation from a stage of criminal practice - intake, investigation, charging, initial appearance, bail, discovery, motion practice, negotiation, trial preparation, trial, sentencing, appeal, post-conviction work, supervision, or reentry. Then address:

- What decision, problem, or professional responsibility was involved?
- How did law, procedure, facts, evidence, resources, and personnel shape the available choices?
- Whose perspectives or interests were visible, and whose may have been missing?
- What did the experience teach you about discretion, fairness, ethics, accuracy, public safety, individual rights, or consequences for affected people?
- What would you need to know or do before making a similar recommendation yourself?

Part B - Midterm feedback and adjustment

- Summarize the most useful feedback you have received without quoting confidential work product or identifying a matter.
- Assess your progress on the three competencies chosen in Journal 1. Support each assessment with a generalized example.
- Identify one habit, skill, or communication practice you will change for the second half of the externship.
- State whether your hours, assignments, supervision, and learning goals are on track. If not, explain the step you will take and whether you need help from me.

Focused Reflection: Criminal-Practice

Minimum length: 500 words

Choose one topic below. Anchor the reflection in a generalized experience or observation; do not write only a legal-research essay.

- Discretion and power: how charging, investigation, negotiation, sentencing, supervision, or case-management choices are made and reviewed.
- Evidence and credibility: how lawyers assess reliability, gaps, bias, corroboration, or the difference between proof and inference.
- Rights and practical realities: how a constitutional or procedural protection operates in everyday practice.
- Negotiated justice: the roles of risk, uncertainty, information, leverage, client goals, victim interests, and collateral consequences.
- Communication and human impact: client counseling, witness interaction, trauma-informed practice, cultural humility, language access, or communicating across differences.
- Role-specific ethics: confidentiality, advocacy, loyalty, candor, conflicts, competence, fairness, or another duty.
- Resources and system design: how workload, staffing, technology, services, or institutional incentives affect outcomes and professional judgment.
- Professional identity and sustainability: stress, boundaries, resilience, teamwork, moral tension, or the kind of criminal-law professional you want to become.

Your reflection must include

- The What - So What - Now What structure;
- A connection between law-school learning and what you observed in practice;
- At least two perspectives or competing considerations;
- One question you still have; and
- One specific action, conversation, skill practice, or research step you will take next.

Final Reflection: Growth and Next Steps

Minimum length: 1,000 words plus the completed J4 ratings

Part A - Repeat the self-assessment

1. Complete the J4 column of the same competency worksheet using the 1-5 scale.
2. Compare your J1 and J4 ratings. Do not simply list changes; identify the experiences and feedback that support your assessment.
3. For any important competency that did not develop as expected, explain what limited the opportunity and how you will continue building it.

Part B - Overall criminal-practice reflection

Use What - So What - Now What to address all of the following:

- Goals and work: Which learning-plan goals did you meet, partly meet, or revise? Identify two generalized assignments or observations that best demonstrate your learning.
- Professional judgment: How has your understanding changed about the relationship among law, facts, evidence, procedure, discretion, resources, and human consequences?
- Feedback and performance: What did you learn about how you receive feedback, communicate status, manage time, check detail, and ask for help?
- Ethics and fairness: What new perspective or understanding will you carry forward? How will you recognize when to pause and seek guidance?
- Professional identity: What did the placement teach you about the kind of lawyer you want to be, the kind of office you want to work in, the kinds of clients you want to serve?
- Next steps: State three concrete actions for the next six months - one skill to practice, one knowledge area to strengthen, and one professional habit or relationship to develop.

Final check before every submission

- I answered the assigned prompt and met the minimum word count.
- I moved beyond description to analysis and a concrete next step.
- I used neutral, anonymous descriptions and omitted protected information.
- I did not paste or attach placement work product or records.
- I proofread enough that the professor can follow my thinking.
- I identified any concern that requires a separate prompt conversation with the professor.