

Writing for Political Risk Notes by Jeff Riley, King's College Careers Service August 2009

A war studies Masters student talked to us about doing 'remote' work for a political risk company.

How did you get the work?

as this was a 'remote' internship there wasn't an interview but I was asked to submit a 350 word *writing sample*. I know lots of people sent in excerpts from essays but I had a go at writing a report – the kind I knew from talking to a friend in the business that I would have to submit for clients – who are mainly business investors.

The trick is to make sure you are focused on recent events with a succinct summary of what has happened but more especially a *projection* forward of likely events that might impact on say, political stability or the economy. I also met up with them informally before they gave me the position but this wasn't an interview as such (I actually met the guy once I had the job, just to get a bit of face time I suppose).

What was the work like?

There are key differences between this type of writing and academic essays. The reader is most likely a businessman not a professor and they are less interested in background information (unless the piece is a longer, more comprehensive country profile. For short briefings, background info may be necessary, but only insofar as it directly sheds light on the present and predicted future). They expect more contemporary material that could be drawn from a wider range of sources. These include blogs and web sites that more academic writing doesn't tend to refer to. (They don't ask you, as such, to refer only to certain sources. Academic sources wouldn't be snubbed. However, the internet provides much more current resources and blogs especially may give a view of what is going on on the ground that English-language press doesn't cover...What they're after is info that may be slightly more under-the-radar, and as current as possible. So you need to be resourceful – look at local press if you can speak the language, look for different angles etc. Sometimes the story you're covering may not be well covered in English-language media online anyway, so a bit of detective work is often required).

The style of writing is also different. Clients need stuff they can scan quickly so long, convoluted sentences are out and short snappy sentences are in. This is true whether the pieces are just 380 words long or more comprehensive country reviews of 3000 words. You should also use the language and vocabulary that your readers will know. I'm not an economics expert, for example, but I quickly had to come to grips with phrases like 'downside risk'

The material you write is less academically rigorous – no referencing, for example and you are having to turn stuff round very quickly.

Any tips for applicants?

It's quite important that applicants get across their specific areas of expertise – especially *regional* areas of expertise. So, even if your course has given you a global view of events, make sure you flag up your regional-specific material. If you can put this together with some first-hand experience of particular areas then you are on your way to presenting yourself as an expert.

You didn't get paid for your work?

No, but I'm glad I did it. I must have written around 30 reports in 3 months and they took on average two to three hours each and I didn't get a penny. I learned a lot though. Even about my area of interest – Latin America. It took my knowledge to a new level which will stand me in good stead for further applications. I also developed new areas of expertise. I had to learn a lot about economics for example. I also developed a knowledge of where to look for information. The other important positive for me was on my confidence. I got a little bit of feedback at the early stages but after that my stuff seemed to meet their requirements. In the end I felt I was able to hold my own in this area and this gives me confidence about finding other opportunities – it looks great on my CV as well.