



WRITING A JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP COVER LETTER* ¹

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A clerkship application generally includes a resume, writing sample, letters of recommendation, and a cover letter. All components are important, but the cover letter in particular provides the applicant a unique opportunity to distinguish his or herself from the pool. Thus, drafting clear, concise, and error-free cover letters is a critical step in the clerkship application process.

Unlike other types of legal jobs where more comprehensive cover letters are preferred, judicial clerkship cover letters should make a strong impression without excessive detail and should not exceed one page. The cover letter mostly functions as a transmittal document that provides a brief biographical summary, states any geographic connection, and explains the components of the application packet. The paragraph breakdown below is a **suggested** format.

Paragraph 1: The What/The Who

- Provide the important introductory information:
 - Your name, where you go to school, your year in law school or when you graduated.
 - Your availability.
 - This can be generic (“next available clerkship position,” or “available August 2026 and any later term”), so long as it accurately reflects your availability.
 - If you do specify a term, make sure it fits the judge’s description exactly (e.g., one-year versus two-year term, the correct years). Expressing interest in the wrong term can get you quickly discarded from the pile.
- Note any geographic tie to the judge’s state/jurisdiction.
 - For example, you are from there, have a significant other who is from there, and/or you plan to practice in that area long-term.
- Finally, note if this position is your first choice, and/or if you have a **genuine**, particular interest in clerking for this judge. Be brief and specific about your reasoning.
 - Examples: a specific professor the judge knows recommended you apply to her, you know one of the judge’s current or former clerks, or you and the judge have shared career interests (e.g., the judge was a public defender and you plan to become one).

* Revised by Abby West in 2024. Original version by Lauren Kelleher (2016).

¹ Also see Georgetown’s *Cover Letter Guide for Judicial Clerkships*, GEORGETOWN LAW, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Clerkship-Cover-Letter-Guide-19-05-20.pdf>, and consider scheduling an appointment with one of Georgetown’s clerkship advisors to discuss the application process.

Paragraph 2: The Why

- For Georgetown students, a well-written “why” paragraph is highly recommended because it is your chance to make a compelling, interesting case for what is unique about you, and how your life experience is relevant to being a good clerk.
 - This paragraph functions as a mini personal statement. You can share appropriate personal information, but make sure you would be willing to discuss anything you choose to share in an interview.
 - The why paragraph can weave together your traits with your professional and academic experiences. Consider examples that show professional maturity, good judgment, decision-making ability, and/or perseverance.
- To be effective, this paragraph should not:
 - Be a restatement of your resume or a laundry list of your work experience.
 - The judge can cross-reference your cover letter against your resume.
 - Instead of “During law school I interned at the DOJ, the SEC, and for Judge Smith,” consider “My three internships during law school...”
 - Come across as disingenuous or arrogant.
 - Repetitive “I” statements can read immodestly.
 - E.g., “I wrote an insightful Note on x. I also worked tirelessly as a research assistant, and I was the Editor-in-Chief of Journal.”
 - Instead, choose one or two of those experiences and be specific about what positive traits they helped you develop.
 - A judge may view hyperbolic expressions as disingenuous.

Paragraph 3: The Closing

- List the other materials included in your application packet (resume, transcript, writing sample) and the names of your recommenders.
 - Generally, you do not need to explain your writing sample in your cover letter. But if it gives you a chance to “name drop” a notable practitioner or a professor who is not one of your recommenders, a brief description could be worthwhile.
 - If you choose not to include a why paragraph, the space could be used to provide the names and contact information of your recommenders.
- Thank the judge for their consideration and offer to provide additional information.

IF YOU DO NOTHING ELSE, do these three things! These may seem obvious, but they protect against the types of errors that get your application quickly discarded from the pile.

1. **Check to make sure you included the correct judge’s name and address in the address line.** It is easy to mess up if you are sending a lot of packets.
2. **Proofread for spelling and grammatical errors.** Consider reading through the letter out loud or backwards, as this can make it easier to catch mistakes.
3. **Verify that you have included all the attachments the judge requested.** Make sure that you correctly listed those components in the final paragraph.

Now for some examples! Please note the examples below are representative of different types of cover letters from students with a range of career plans, post-graduate plans, and degrees of geographic ties to where they are applying.²

² For other helpful resources, consider the following: THE APPELLATE PROJECT, CLERKSHIP HANDBOOK (2023), <https://theappellateproject.org/tap-clerkship-handbook>; Mishkah Ismail & Andrew Kim, *How to Apply for a Clerkship—And What to Expect*, GPSOLO, Sept.–Oct. 2015, at 46, 47–49.

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[DATE]

The Honorable Jane Doe
Richard H. Poff Federal Building
210 Franklin Road, S.W.
Roanoke, VA 24011

Dear Judge Doe:

I am writing to apply for a clerkship in your chambers for the Fall 2026 term, or any subsequent term. I am currently a 2L at Georgetown University Law Center and plan to complete a one-year litigation fellowship in the D.C. area following graduation.

As an aspiring civil rights attorney with extensive federal litigation experience both prior to and during law school, I believe I would make a strong addition to your chambers. The breadth of my work experience reflects a commitment to tackling systemic social justice issues through impact litigation as well as honing the skills that will make me an effective advocate and judicial clerk. This year I am also a member of Georgetown's Appellate Litigation Clinic where I am continuing to refine my research and writing skills by briefing and arguing cases before the Fourth Circuit and local state courts of appeal.

My resume, unofficial transcript, writing sample, and recommendations from Professors XXXX and YYYY are submitted with this application. I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

[SIGNATURE]
Candidate for Juris Doctor 2025

Commented [A1]: If you are applying for clerkships further out from graduation, you should consider letting the judge know what you plan to do immediately after graduation.

Commented [A2]: Use of the word "extensive" is appropriate here because the applicant has work experience from before law school, in addition to the clinic and forthcoming fellowship.

Commented [A3]: Instead of listing each internship and job that provided the applicant with federal litigation experience, the applicant has appropriately summarized with this description. The judge/clerks can review the resume for a reminder of what these experiences were.

Commented [A4]: You can create a JPG of your scanned signature to use here.

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]

[DATE]

The Honorable Jane Smith
Edward T. Gignoux Federal Courthouse
156 Federal Street, 2nd Floor
Portland, ME 04101

Dear Judge Smith:

I am a clerk for Justice John Doe on [COURT] and a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center. I write to apply for a clerkship in your chambers starting in the Fall of 2028, or any later term. I would welcome the opportunity to return to the Northeast, as my family lives in New Hampshire and I intend to practice in the region.

Commented [A5]: Judges are increasingly prioritizing hiring graduates who have work experience after law school, so it is something to highlight.

Commented [A6]: This is an example of a succinct description of geographic ties to the judge's region.

Enclosed please find my resume, a writing sample, my transcript, and letters of recommendation from the following people:

Name
Phone
Email Address

Commented [A7]: This applicant has included the contact information for her recommenders in her cover letter. If you choose not to include a "why" paragraph, you may choose to use the space in this way.

Name
Phone
Email Address

Name
Phone
Email Address

I have also attached a list of references to this letter.

Commented [A8]: Some judges also want a separate list of references. Make sure you double-check each judge's requested enclosures before sending your application.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional information. I can be reached by phone at [PHONE] or by email at [EMAIL]. Thank you very much for considering my application.

Respectfully,

[SIGNATURE]

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]

[DATE]

The Honorable Jane Doe
The New Jersey Supreme Court
Suite 1101, North Tower
158 Headquarters Plaza
Morristown, NJ 07960

Dear Justice Doe:

I am a third-year law student at Georgetown University Law Center. I write to apply for the next available clerkship position in your chambers at the [COURT]. I spoke with [your former clerk] about clerkship opportunities in [STATE]; he expressed enthusiasm and admiration for the intellectual rigor with which you approach your work. Clerking in your chambers at the [COURT] would be my first choice for a job after I graduate.

Commented [A9]: Providing availability generically (rather than offering specific date ranges) can help you to avoid errors, especially if you are sending lots of applications.

My experience as a first-generation law student has ingrained in me a deep commitment to promoting access to justice, which I was able to put into practice by participating in the Criminal Justice Clinic. It has also equipped me to think critically about nuanced legal questions and to consider issues from all angles, which would enable me to contribute meaningfully to your chambers.

Commented [A10]: Noting that you have spoken with a former clerk shows you have a clear idea of why you would want to work for that specific judge.

Commented [A11]: A strong statement like this can set you apart from other applicants but should only be included for the position that is your top choice.

Enclosed please find my resume, writing sample, and transcript. Letters of recommendation from Professors XXX, YYY, and ZZZ will arrive separately. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information. I can be reached by phone at [PHONE], or by email at [EMAIL]. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Commented [A12]: "Why" paragraphs can include more personal information, so long as you are comfortable discussing it in an interview.

Respectfully,

[SIGNATURE]
Candidate for Juris Doctor 2024

NAME
[Street, City, State Zip]
[Email] ♦ [Phone]

[DATE]

[JUDGE]
[COURT]
[COURTHOUSE]
[ADDRESS 1]
[ADDRESS 2]

Dear Chief Judge [LAST-NAME]:

I am a third-year student at Georgetown University Law Center where I am an [Editor] for the [Journal]. I write to apply for a 2026–2027 term clerkship in your chambers. In addition to the Court's general docket, your work for the [specialized docket] is what especially interested me in applying to your chambers. I worked for a [specialized docket-related] company before law school and deeply appreciated its focus on []; thus, I would welcome the chance to contribute to a judicial program with a similar commitment.

Serving as a legal research and writing fellow prepared me to contribute meaningfully to the [court's] work. Writing my bench memorandum—which is attached as one of my writing samples—pushed me to think critically but objectively about a complex issue of law. Moreover, providing multiple rounds of comprehensive, detailed feedback for ten students' memoranda and briefs required me to identify analytical weaknesses, articulate concrete ways to improve their documents, and manage my time adeptly. Overall, this experience prepared me to evaluate different legal arguments and appreciate a variety of legal voices.

Enclosed please find my resume, law school transcript, and writing samples. Letters of recommendation from Professors AAA, BBB, and CCC will arrive separately. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information. I can be reached at [PHONE], or by email at [EMAIL]. Thank you very much for considering my application.

Respectfully,
[SIGNATURE]

Commented [A13]: Make sure to use the appropriate title (e.g., judge, justice, chief judge) in your greeting.

Commented [A14]: Expressing a particular interest in the judge's work can help set your cover letter apart. Linking that interest to a prior experience can help to convey that the interest is genuine.

Commented [A15]: Always double-check what additional materials the judge has requested (e.g., multiple writing samples).

[NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[DATE]

The Honorable John Doe
District of Columbia Court of Appeals
430 E Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Judge Doe:

I am a third-year evening student at Georgetown University Law Center where I am the [EDITOR] of [JOURNAL]. I am writing to apply for a 2027–2028 term clerkship in your chambers. I have greatly enjoyed living and working in Washington, D.C. these past three years and would welcome the opportunity to serve in the district as a judicial clerk.

Commented [A16]: This student was on the executive board of his journal, which bears mentioning in a cover letter.

Because of my passion for public service, I enrolled in Georgetown’s part-time program so that I could continue working for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Balancing my job with my rigorous course load has been a welcome challenge, and it has prepared me to be able to keep up with the [court’s] full docket.

Commented [A17]: Noting an interest in remaining in D.C. if you are applying for judges here—particularly if you are from somewhere else—can signal to the judge that you are genuinely interested in the position.

Enclosed please find my resume, law school transcript, and writing sample. The writing sample, which I drafted for Judge Smith’s seminar, analyzes the viability of consumer protection claims under New York and California law and discusses whether federal law should preempt such claims. Arriving separately are three letters of recommendation Professors XXX, YYY, and [CFPB supervisor].

Commented [A18]: This applicant opted to describe his writing sample in his cover letter because it allowed him to “name drop” the judge whose seminar he took but who is not one of his recommenders. Another option is to include a short cover page with the writing sample that provides this information.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional information. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

[SIGNATURE]