

GEORGETOWN LAW JUDICIAL CLERKSHIPS

Cover Letter Guide for Judicial Clerkships

A cover letter sets a positive tone for review of your resume and credentials, and it can play a significant role in convincing a judge to grant you a judicial clerkship interview. Prior to writing your letter, we recommend that you read the information in this guide. Our clerkship advisors are always happy to discuss the components of a cover letter and to review your draft(s). Please feel free to schedule an appointment with one of our clerkship advisors, Michele Hoff or Andrea Glosser, to discuss your specific questions.

General Guidelines

- Be brief! Your cover letter should never be more than one page.
- Think of your cover letter as a writing sample – and make sure to proofread and edit it carefully.
- Avoid simply repeating the information on your resume in your cover letter.
- Focus on statements of fact. Do not include language which could be perceived as puffery or bragging.
- Share something interesting about yourself and/or compelling about your candidacy. This can be your opportunity to insert some relevant personal information into your application.
- Avoid discussing how the clerkship will help you hone your research and writing skills or would generically benefit you.

Components of a Judicial Clerkship Letter

- **Address Blocks and Salutation Line** – As with any cover letter, include your name and address, date, and the recipient address block. The first line of the recipient address block should read as “The Honorable [Judge’s First Name, Judge’s Last Name].” The salutation line should read “Dear Judge [Judge’s Last Name]:”
- **First Paragraph** – State your year level and journal membership if applicable. Tell the judge the term(s) for which you are applying. For example, “I am a second-year student at Georgetown University Law Center and a member of *Georgetown Law Journal*. I am writing to apply for a 2020 term clerkship in your chambers.”

If you have a connection to the geographic area where the judge sits (have family in the area, plan to practice there after law school, etc.) or have a personal connection to the court or the judge (you’ve networked with the current clerk, met the judge at a reception, etc.), you can mention it in one to two sentences at the end of the first paragraph.

- **Additional Paragraph** – We encourage you to include an additional paragraph about yourself that could focus on one or more of the following themes:
 - **Your specific interest in this court and this judge.** Judges want to know why you are interested in the specific court and his/her specific chambers. If you have a particular reason for applying

to a judge, you can describe it. For example, perhaps the judge visited your class, or you studied a specific opinion of that judge which motivated you to apply? Do you and the judge share similarities in your backgrounds or professional interests?

- **Relevant, unique attributes that set you apart.** Judges usually receive applications from a number of qualified candidates and often want to know what makes you compelling. For example, were you the first in your family to attend college? Are you a veteran? Is there something about your background that makes you unique and led to your decision to practice law or to clerk?
- **Applying to a speciality court.** If you are applying to clerk at a speciality court like bankruptcy or international trade, you should highlight your experience in that substantive area of law and describe your interest in clerking for that particular court.
- **Applying to a state trial level court.** Clerks in state trial level courts often are responsible for managing the judge's very busy caseload in addition to conducting research and writing. Applicants applying to state level trial courts can include a paragraph highlighting their professional skills such as case management, organizational, and communication skills. In addition, if you are applying to a state court with a specialized docket, you should also highlight your interest and experience in that particular area of law.
- **Concluding Paragraphs.** List the documents that you have enclosed. (Typically you will be asked to include your resume, law school transcript, and writing sample.) Clearly state the names of your recommenders and explain how your letters of recommendation will arrive in chambers. If applying through OSCAR, you can state that "Letters of recommendation are attached." If applying in hard copy, you will often state that "letters of recommendation will be sent under separate cover." (Note, it is important to provide name, title and contact information for each recommender. If you do not want to include all of that information in your cover letter, it can be provided on a separate, clearly marked list of references.) End the letter by thanking the judge and offering to provide additional information.