



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

The Law School

JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP COVER LETTERS

Career Development Office

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JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP COVER LETTERS

Judicial clerkship cover letters should be kept brief—in no circumstance should they be more than one page. The cover letter is simply the conduit for your application materials, so allow your resume to convey your pertinent information. Above all, you must avoid making any grammatical or typographical errors in your cover letter. It is essentially your first writing sample, so any mistake can cause your application to be thrown out without further review. Use a simple, easy-to-read font matching your resume’s font in 10- or 12-point size and margins of at least one inch.

Addressing the Letter

Correctly address your cover letter and envelope with the proper titles. All judges are referred to as “The Honorable,” followed by his or her full name (including middle initial, if known), the court in which the judge sits, and the address:

The Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Court for the Southern District of New York
Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

The Honorable Patricia O’Brien Cotter
Montana Supreme Court
Justice Building
215 North Sanders
Helena, MT 59620

In the salutation, always use the appropriate title (e.g., Judge/Justice/Chief Justice) followed by the judge’s last name.

Dear Judge Cote:

Dear Justice Cotter:

Senior, magistrate, and bankruptcy judges are addressed simply as “Judge” with no modifier.

Close the letter with “Respectfully” instead of “Sincerely.”

Writing the Standard Form Letter

Your cover letter should contain the following information:

- 1) Your contact information (mailing address, phone number, and email address) in an address block or header.
- 2) Your status as a student at Notre Dame Law School and your year of graduation.
- 3) The judicial term for which you are applying (e.g., I am writing to apply for a position as a law clerk in your chambers for the 2018–2019 term). If you are interested in both one- and two-year clerkships, state that you are applying for a clerkship “beginning in 2019.”
- 4) The items that are enclosed with the cover letter (e.g., Enclosed please find my resume, transcript, writing sample, and a list of references who will provide letters of recommendation under separate cover).
- 5) A brief description in the cover letter of the context of your writing sample.
- 6) The names, titles, and contact information of people who will be sending letters of recommendation on your behalf, or the names and titles of people whose letters are included in your application.
- 7) Any references. For example, if you did a judicial externship, then that judge may not write a letter of recommendation but will serve as a reference. You can note that in your letter.
- 8) Any dates you will be near the courthouse and available for an interview.

Going Beyond the Universal Cover Letter

Every cover letter should contain the information above. In some cases, particularly when applying to state courts, it is appropriate to include more information. Do not simply restate your resume, though. Remember to focus on why you are interested in this specific judge and any unique qualifications you possess.

Some additional facts you may want to include are:

- 1) A geographic connection to the area that is not immediately evident from your resume, the fact that you are only applying to courts in a specific geographic area, or that you have a strong commitment to practice in that location after clerking.
- 2) The name of any person who specifically referred you to the judge.
- 3) Something about a judge’s background that makes you especially interested in clerking for him or her.
- 4) Extensive legal writing experience.
- 5) Your interest in a specific area of law if the court is one of limited jurisdiction, or your particular interest in a trial or appellate court.
- 6) Relevant specialized classes or prior experience in a field directly related to the court.
- 7) How a prior judicial internship influenced your desire to clerk.

Sample Judicial Clerkship Cover Letters

Sample Letter #1 – the Basic

Ruggero Aldisert, a former judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, advocated a standard form cover letter. In his article *The Rat Race: Insider Advice on Landing Judicial Clerkships*, he supplies the following sample letter as a good example. We recommend this cover letter for the majority of situations.

Joseph Applicant
123 Eddy Street
South Bend, IN 46556

August 15, 2016

The Honorable Jane Branstetter Stranch
701 Broadway, Room 330
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Judge Stranch,

I am a third-year student at Notre Dame Law School and _____ editor of the _____ Journal/Law Review. I am writing to apply for a 2018–2019 term clerkship in your chambers.

Enclosed please find my resume, law school and undergraduate transcripts, and writing sample. The writing sample is a Note I wrote examining _____. Also enclosed are letters of recommendation from Professors Julian Velasco (574.631.4965), Paolo Carozza (574.631.4128), and Veronica Root (574.631.4766). The Honorable Rebecca R. Pallmeyer of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois has also agreed to serve as a reference and may be reached at 712.546.8811.

If there is any other information that would be helpful to you, please let me know. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Joseph Applicant

Sample Letter #2 – Format for Including More Detail

[Your address]

[Date]

[Judge's Address]

[Salutation]

[1st Paragraph: Identify yourself, your law school, what position you are seeking, and for what time period. If you have specific reasons for wanting to clerk for this judge, state them here. For instance, mention a geographical connection to the area, the name of a person who referred you to this judge, any connection you have with this specific judge, or your interest in a trial or appellate court or specific area of law for a court of limited jurisdiction.]

[2nd Paragraph: Provide your qualifications for a clerkship here. Instead of restating facts that are self-evident from your resume, offer examples from your background. Two good topics for this paragraph are extensive legal researching and writing experience or prior employment that has prepared you for a clerkship.]

[3rd Paragraph: Explain which documents are enclosed and who your references are. Tell the judge when you will be in the area for a potential interview. Finally, thank the judge for considering your application.]

Respectfully,

[Signature]

[Name]

Enclosures

Sample Letter #3 – Including the Specifics

Martin Prince
2255 Eagle Rock #5
Granger, IN 46555
555-123-6789
email@nd.edu

September 6, 2016

The Honorable Robert E. Payne
United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia
Spottswood W. Robinson III and Robert R. Merhige, Jr., Federal Courthouse
701 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Judge Payne:

Please accept this letter as an application for a clerkship in your chambers for the 2018–2020 term. Professor John Doe of Notre Dame Law School recommended that I write to you when he learned of my interest in clerking after I graduate from Notre Dame in May 2018.

As you will see from my enclosed transcript and resume, I earned my Master's degree in engineering prior to law school. I am particularly interested in a clerkship with you because of the large number of patent cases on your docket. I spent last summer clerking at Leydig, Voit & Mayer, Ltd., an intellectual property law firm in Chicago, and I believe that this experience prepared me well for a clerkship in your chambers.

Enclosed please find a copy of my resume, my most recent transcript, and a writing sample. My writing sample is a draft of an opinion that I wrote for Judge Walter S. Smith, Jr. last summer, included with his permission. Finally, letters of recommendation from Judge Smith (817-750-1519), Professor John Doe (574-631-3642), and Professor Stacy Williamson (574-631-3572) are also included.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the above address and telephone number. Thank you very much for considering my application.

Respectfully,

Martin Prince

Sample Letter #4 – More Personalization in a Resume-Matching Format

Allison Taylor

57436 Willis Street, South Bend, IN 46637
ataylor@nd.edu • 574-619-6196

September 6, 2016

The Honorable Charles A. Wilson
U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit
Sam M. Gibbons United States Courthouse
801 North Florida Avenue, Room 16B
Tampa, FL 33602

Dear Judge Wilson:

I am a third-year student at Notre Dame Law School and am writing to apply for a clerkship in your chambers beginning in September 2019. As a native of Florida, I am particularly interested in returning home to clerk. My summer with the Appellate Practice team at Foley & Lardner convinced me that clerking for a federal appellate court will be the ideal way to begin my career.

Attached for your review are my résumé, law school transcript, writing sample, and list of references. The writing sample is an excerpt from my legal writing assignment that received the Dean's Award for one of the best briefs in the class. Letters of recommendation from Notre Dame Professors Nicole Garnett, Lloyd Hitoshi Mayer, and Julian Velasco will be sent under separate cover.

Thank you for considering my application. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide you with any additional information.

Respectfully,

Allison Taylor

(Note that with this letter a separate page of References would be included, listing each professor's name, title, email, telephone number, and address.)

JESSICA LOVEJOY

email@nd.edu
574-111-1111

101 Country Club Drive
Jefferson City, Missouri 65109

10 Fischer Graduate Residences, Apt. 1A
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

May 7, 2017

The Honorable Daniel Kelly
Wisconsin Supreme Court
16 East State Capitol
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Justice Kelly:

I am a second-year student at Notre Dame Law School and an Article Editor on the *Notre Dame Law Review*. I am writing to express my interest in a clerkship in your chambers for the 2019–2020 term.

I was born and raised in Wisconsin, and I plan to practice in my home state upon completion of a clerkship. I plan to join a small law firm with a regional practice. I am particularly interested in a clerkship with your court because I believe it will help me prepare for a general practice in state law. While in law school, I have taken classes in contracts, torts, property law, family law, and trusts and estates. In addition, this year I am participating in the Legal Aid Clinic, where I have worked on issues ranging from domestic relations and elder abuse to land use and contracts. I believe these experiences have prepared me to contribute meaningfully to your chambers.

A copy of my resume and my most recent transcript are enclosed. I have also included, with permission, a copy of a motion that I prepared as part of my clinic experience this year. Letters of recommendation from Professor Jay Tidmarsh (jtidmarsh@nd.edu, 574-631-6985) and Professor Julian Velasco (jvelasco@nd.edu, 574-631-4965) will be sent under separate cover. Thank you very much for considering my application.

Respectfully

Jessica Lovejoy

Enclosures