THE OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES
at Vermont Law School
www.vermontlaw.edu/career

PREPARING CLERKSHIP COVER LETTERS

The purpose of the clerkship cover letter is not to repeat your resume, but to express and highlight your interest and qualifications. The cover letter can set you apart from other applicants by highlighting special things about you that make you a worthy candidate, such as geographical ties, academic ties, and interesting employment or life experience.

What the Clerkship Cover Letter MUST Include:

1) year in law school (or when you graduated from law school and whether you are admitted to a bar)
2) your interest in research and writing, why you like research and writing and what experience you have had researching and writing (if you don't like legal research and writing, you may not want to do a clerkship)
3) some pertinent work, academic and life experience that gave you the skills to be successful in a clerkship (and what these skills are and why they will help you succeed in a clerkship)
4) anything that connects you to the court, judge or geographic region where the court is situated
5) what you want to gain from your clerkship
6) what you will give to the judge/court during your clerkship term (in other words, what will make the judge/court perceive you as a hard, competent worker with whom it is a pleasure to work)

***This factor is crucial – even if you are supremely qualified for the clerkship, you still need to set yourself apart from all the other supremely qualified applicants. Nice, polite, fun, happy and optimistic (but not in a cheerleader-type way) goes a long way in a cover letter! And, for goodness sake, if all you say in your cover letter is "I want to suck the life blood out of your court for two years and then never talk to you again," no one will want to work with you. Find the balance – you want to take from the clerkship, but you also want to give to the court and the legal community.

What NOT to Include in the Cover Letter:

1) a recitation of your resume
2) anything that gives the impression you want a clerkship because it is prestigious and will make you marketable
3) political affiliations or preferences
4) criticism of anyone or any court
5) your life story, particularly if it includes tragedy (falls under the "TMI"category – Too Much Information)
6) If you are a distant cousin of a judge or live on the same block as a judge, this isn't the place to introduce yourself
7) The letter <u>shall not be</u> more than one page

Should You Name Drop?

It depends. If you have done a clerkship or internship for another judge or court, by all means say so. If you know a person the judge you are applying with might know, it will depend on how well you know that person AND how well the judge knows that person. A nice approach

is to talk to the person you know about applying to the judge or court, and then say something like “I recently spoke with John Doe who said he knows you well. He encouraged me to apply for a clerkship with you.” If the judge knows and likes John Doe, you have a small seal of approval. Just make sure you are truthful in your representation, because the judge may well check up with John Doe about you.

Suggested Format for Cover Letter:

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Who you are, year in school
- Clerkship you are applying for
- One sentence explanation of why you want to do a clerkship
- If on law review and/or high class rank (top 25% or higher), consider putting this in the first paragraph rather than the second.

Paragraph 2: Credentials

- Class rank, academic honors, journals or moot court honors (if you already put this in the first paragraph, you may consider whether you need it in the second paragraph too – you may want to work it in as a way you continue to develop your research and writing skills).
- Work experience which gave you research and writing experience
- Other experience of any kind which gave you skills relevant to a clerkship

Paragraph 3: Personal Characteristics

- This is the “why you should pick me over other people” paragraph. What makes you a good choice for a clerk? What can you give back to the court during your clerkship?

Paragraph 4: Conclusion

- “Thank you for your consideration”
- Any specific dates you will be in the area (for interviews) – however, always indicate you are happy to interview with the court at its convenience (if you are applying to clerkships in Alaska, be prepared for the reality that you might have to go there for an interview).
- Contact information if different from that on resume and letterhead

The letter must be one page only – no exceptions.

How to Address a Cover Letter:

The address should be formatted as follows:

The Honorable [John Q. Doe]
[Court]
[Street Address]
[City State, Zip Code]

Dear Judge [or Justice]* Doe:

*Use “Justice” for judges in the highest appellate court, and “Judge” for all other judges.

NAME
P.O. Box 14501 • South Royalton, VT • (802) 763-0000 • name@vermontlaw.edu

DATE

The Honorable Perry Mason
New Jersey Trial Court
123 Main Street
Newark, NJ 12345

Dear Judge Mason,

Please accept my application for a position as a judicial law clerk in your chambers. I am a third year student at Vermont Law School with a solid academic background, strong research and writing skills, and a genuine interest in working within the judicial system in New Jersey while further refining my research and writing skills.

My interest in serving as a judicial law clerk in New Jersey is a result of several factors. First, I very much enjoy research and writing and would welcome the chance to make that the centerpiece of my first job after law school. Second, working as a judicial law clerk has been highly recommended to me by classmates who are currently clerking for the New Jersey Trial Court. Lastly, as you can see from my resume, I am committed to developing a career that ultimately focuses on ocean and coastal issues. As a result, I would welcome the chance to learn more about the practices and procedures of the New Jersey court system in preparation for a career there.

I am well prepared to contribute to your chambers as a result of my academic background and work experience. Academically, I am in the top 25% of my class and have received an academic excellence award for achieving the highest grade in my legal writing class. In terms of experience, I am fortunate to have had a lot of hands-on experience during the summer of 2002. Working with a solo practitioner gave me valuable one-on-one insight and feedback. Moreover, my experience at NOAA last summer was essential in helping me gain additional skills while also introducing me to the governmental sector. I am certain that my well-developed legal research and writing skills and my varied legal experience in government and private practice would be an asset to your chambers. Finally, my involvement with various student groups on campus has given me both a great outlet from the rigors of law school while also providing me the opportunity to develop leadership skills. All of these experiences have contributed to my professional development and I am looking forward to drawing on these skills as I continue with my professional career.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how I might contribute to your chambers as a law clerk. Thank you for your consideration of the enclosed material and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name here