Cover Letters: General Considerations

Cover letters are the first piece of your writing that a judge will see. The cover letters and resumes for each judge must be error-free, produced on good bond paper (white or cream), and signed with blue or black ink. Judges will make decisions on the basis of the complete package: cover letter, resume, recommendations, transcript(s), and writing sample(s).

Keep in mind that a cover letter is, in essence, a piece of advocacy. You should think about how it will sound to your audience, and you should consider whether to write different letters to different judges. Sometimes you may wish to communicate a fact not obvious from your resume and not likely to appear in a letter of recommendation. For example, if you are from a particular area of the country, and are applying to judges in that area, you might want to mention your local roots. Or you may wish to mention prior business experience that affects your legal ability. Or, if you are applying to judges concerned with a particular specialty (such as bankruptcy or patent law), you may wish to mention your coursework in that area.

Some judges do like more personalized letters, to demonstrate that you have researched the judge and tailored your application accordingly. If you share a common interest or connection with the judge, it may be worth mentioning in your cover letter (i.e. if you are an alumnus of the same school or know someone in common). Including an “Interests” section on your resume can also demonstrate these potential connections.

Your research and writing skills, academic performance, journal experience, and judicial externship experience are all areas to highlight in the cover letter. But, be cautious in how you summarize your skills. For example a sentence you may include in a standard cover letter such as, "My first year at law school enabled me to improve my writing and my analytic skills," does not distinguish you from other candidates on such a generic statement. Or, "I would like to clerk in order to see whether a career in the judiciary is for me." Some judges may be put off by a declaration that you think yourself good enough for the judge's own job, rather than a mere clerkship.

For additional guidance, please see the How to Write a Resume and How to Write a Cover Letter documents provided by the Office of Career Services. Common sense will be your most trustworthy guide and another set of eyes is always helpful.
A note about salutations and addressing cover letters and envelopes:
It is especially important to properly address judges in correspondence. Use the chart below to help in addressing envelopes and cover letters, as well as for salutations in letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Court</th>
<th>Addressee</th>
<th>Address on cover letter &amp; envelope</th>
<th>Salutation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| U.S. Supreme Court     | The Chief Justice  | The Honorable [Full Name]  
Chief Justice of the United States  
The Supreme Court  
Address                     | Dear Chief Justice [Last Name]:  |
|                         |                    |                                                                                                     |                                     |
| U.S. Supreme Court     | Associate Justice  | The Honorable [Full Name]  
Associate Justice  
The Supreme Court  
Address                     | Dear Justice [Last Name]:         |
|                         |                    |                                                                                                     |                                     |
| U.S. Court of Appeals   | Chief Judge        | Honorable [Full Name]  
Chief Judge  
United States Court of Appeals for the  
[Number-th] Circuit  
Address                     | Dear Judge [Last Name]:          |
|                         |                    |                                                                                                     |                                     |
| U.S. Court of Appeals   | Judge              | Honorable [Full Name]  
United States Court of Appeals for the  
[Number-th] Circuit  
Address                     | Dear Judge [Last Name]:          |
|                         |                    |                                                                                                     |                                     |
| U.S. District Court     | Chief Judge        | Honorable [Full Name]  
Chief Judge  
United States District Court for the  
[District Name]  
Address                     | Dear Judge [Last Name]:          |
|                         |                    |                                                                                                     |                                     |
| U.S. District Court     | Judge              | Honorable [Full Name]  
United States District Court for the  
[District Name]  
Address                     | Dear Judge [Last Name]:          |
|                         |                    |                                                                                                     |                                     |
| U.S. Magistrate         | Judge              | Honorable [Full Name]  
United States Magistrate Judge  
United States District Court for the  
[District Name]  
Address                     | Dear Judge [Last Name]:          |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Court Type</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Honorable Title and Address</th>
<th>Greeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| U.S. Bankruptcy     | Chief Judge  | Chief Judge  
United States Bankruptcy Court for the  
[District Name]  
Address                                                                   | Dear Judge [Last Name]: |
|                     | Judge        | Honorable Judge [Full Name]  
United States Bankruptcy Court for the  
[District Name]  
Address                                                                   | Dear Judge [Last Name]: |
| State Supreme Court | Chief Justice| Chief Justice  
Supreme Court for the State of [State]  
Address                                                                  | Dear Justice [Last Name]: |
| State Supreme Court | Justice      | Honorable [Full Name]  
Supreme Court for the State of [State]  
Address                                                                | Dear Justice [Last Name]: |
GENERAL MODEL

[YOUR NAME]
[Your address and phone; in the format of your resume]

(Date)

The Honorable [Full Name]
[Address]

Dear Judge [Last Name]:

[Paragraph stating that you wish to apply for a clerkship with your anticipated graduation date]

[Paragraph describing additional facts about yourself and your skills]

[Concluding paragraph, listing enclosures, recommenders, and volunteering to supply more information if needed.]

Sincerely,

[Your name]

Enclosures
August 21, 2008

The Honorable Thomas J. Curran  
United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin  
250 United States Courthouse and Federal Building  
517 E. Wisconsin Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Judge Curran:

I am a third-year law student Loyola University Chicago School of Law and wish to apply for a clerkship in your chambers following my graduating in May 2009.

As Editor in Chief of the *Loyola Law Journal* and brief writer for Loyola’s National Moot Court team, I have had the chance to develop significant legal research and writing skills. In addition to these law school activities, I have extensive experience working as a regional director for the Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives and as a lobbyist for business and non-profit organizations. As a result, I have developed a unique perspective on the policy considerations behind many legal issues.

Enclosed please find a resume, transcript, writing sample and letters of recommendation from Professor John Bronsteen and Professor Spencer Waller. Should you require additional information, or which to schedule an interview, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

*Pamela Beasley Halpert*  
Pamela Beasley Halpert
Pamela Beasley Halpert  
121 W. Chestnut, Apt. 123, Chicago, IL 60611 • 312-555-0155 • pbhalpert@lawschool.edu

EDUCATION
Loyola University Chicago School of Law, Chicago, Illinois  
Juris Doctor, Expected May 2009
GPA 3.63/4.00  
Class Rank 5/58
• Editor in Chief, Loyola University Chicago Law Journal  
• Best Brief – 2007 National Moot Court Competition – Midwest Region
• Best Brief – 2007 Loyola Intraschool Moot Court Competition

University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA  
Bachelor of Arts – Political Science/History, May 2000

EXPERIENCE
Jenner & Block LLP, Chicago, Illinois  
Summer Associate, May 2008 – Present
• Researched and drafted legal memoranda for trial and appellate proceedings.
• Participated in the representation of a utility company in small-claims court by creating exhibits, preparing witnesses and researching evidentiary issues.
• Assisted attorney in commercial arbitration by developing issues for cross examination of expert witnesses and researching Illinois contract law.

National-Louis University, Chicago, Illinois  
Director of Government & Community Affairs, July 2005 – April 2008
• Developed and implemented state and federal government relations plan.
• Organized public events for the university president.

Cullen & Associates, Springfield, Illinois  
Contract Lobbyist, February 2005 – June 2005
• Lobbied members of the General Assembly on behalf of business and government clients.
• Tracked legislation and prepared weekly reports for clients.

Illinois House of Representatives, Office of the Speaker, Chicago, Illinois  
Chicago Operations Manager, January 2003 – January 2005  
Program Specialist, Issue Development Unit, December 2001 – January 2003
• Supervised 25 full and part-time employees in Chicago and Northern Illinois.
• Created and implemented grassroots outreach programs for Democratic incumbents.

Democratic Party of Illinois / Friends of Michael J. Madigan, Chicago, Illinois  
Northern Illinois Regional Coordinator / Campaign Staff, June 2001 – January 2005
• Served in various roles on local, state representative and statewide campaigns.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
Midtown Education Foundation, Chicago, Illinois  
Volunteer, May 2005 – Present
• Mentored grade school students, including academic tutoring and character development
September 8, 2009

The Honorable Wayne R. Andersen
United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois
1486 Everett McKinley Dirksen United States Courthouse
219 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Judge Andersen:

I am a third-year law student at Loyola University Chicago School of Law and wish to apply for a clerkship in your chambers following my graduation in May of 2010. After spending the last few years in Chicago, I would like to remain in the area following graduation.

After reading your opinion in *Alvarado v. Battaglia*, I am confident that we would work well together and that my writing style would complement your expectations and preferences. I found your argument pertaining to the ability of a prisoner to state an excessive force claim particularly interesting. I would enjoy discussing the case more thoroughly with you at your convenience.

A resume, transcript, writing sample, and letters of recommendation from Professor Alice Perlin, Professor James Carey, and Dean Michael Kaufman are enclosed. Should you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

George-Michael Bluth

George-Michael Bluth

Enclosures:
Resume
Transcript
Writing Sample
Letters of recommendation
GEORGE-MICHAEL BLUTH
525 N. Wabash, Apt. #1005D, Chicago, IL 60611 • 312-555-0111 • gbluth@lawschool.edu

EDUCATION
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO SCHOOL OF LAW, CHICAGO, IL
Juris Doctor expected, May 2010
G.P.A. 3.75/4.0 Ranking Top 10\textsuperscript{th} percentile
Loyola Law Journal, Executive Editor, Lead Articles
CALI Award for the highest grade in Legal Writing, Spring 2008
Contracts Academic Tutor
Dean’s List
Mock Trial Team Member, Regional Champion 2008
Executive Board, Catholic Lawyers Guild

GRINELL COLLEGE, GRINELL, IA
Bachelor of Arts, May 2007
Major in English / Minors in Spanish and History

LEGAL EXPERIENCE
• WINSTON & STRAWN LLP, CHICAGO, IL, Summer 2009
  Summer associate working on medical and legal practice and products liability trials

• HINSHAW & CULBERTSON LLP, CHICAGO, IL, Spring 2009
  Law clerk in the Healthcare and Litigation Services Group

• REHABILITATION INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, CHICAGO, IL, Spring 2009
  Intern in the Office of the General Counsel working on compliance issues, litigation research, and drafting a segregation of duties policy

• SUPREME COURT OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN, NE, Summer 2008
  Intern to Justice John Gerrard, wrote certiorari reviews and memoranda or law, assisted drafting and editing opinions, prepared Justice for conference and argument

• PROFESSOR MICHAEL KAUFMAN, CHICAGO, IL, Summer 2008
  Legal research assistant for work on special education article

• PROFESSOR LARRY SINGER, CHICAGO, IL, Summer 2008
  Legal research assistant for various projects regarding modern health care

PUBLICATIONS
• Contextualizing ADR in Managed Care, 38 LOYOLA L. J. 900 (2008).

INTERESTS
• Interests include volunteering, officiating and playing lacrosse, and playing the violin
September 12, 2016

The Honorable Harry Smith, Jr.
United States District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana
United States Courthouse
500 Poydras Street
New Orleans, LA 70130

Dear Judge Smith:

I am a third year student at Loyola University Chicago School of Law and am very interested in clerking in your chambers following my graduation in May 2016. I am drawn to the state of Louisiana both for its rich and diverse history and the hospitality I have experienced there in the past.

My strong interest in this position is driven in large measure by my externships in the Northern District of Illinois with Judge Kendall and Judge St. Eve. During my externships, I enhanced my analytical skills, honed my legal research and writing skills, and learned how to write a judicial opinion in a clear and compelling way. My strengths in legal research and writing have also lead to my position as research assistant for the Director of the Legal Writing program, as well as my editorial positions on the *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* and the *Annals of Health Law*. Furthermore, my capable writing and advocacy abilities have enabled me to work as an academic teaching assistant for two-first year courses during my second year, and I am currently working as an academic teaching assistant for students obtaining their Master of Jurisprudence in Health Law.

I am also motivated to clerk for your chambers because of my passion for public service. This clerkship will not only also me to work in the field of law, but it will also provide me with a unique learning experience that will ultimately enhance my skills as an advocate.

I have enclosed my resume, law school grade sheet, writing sample, and letters of recommendation from Dean Michael Kaufman, Professor Nadia Sawicki, and Professor Alice Perlin. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 312-555-1234 or by email at law.student@luc.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Law Student
June 1, 2016

Michael Fridkin
Senior Staff Attorney
Office of Staff Law Clerks
U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit
219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Mr. Fridkin:

I am writing to apply for a staff law clerk position with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. I hope you will allow me the opportunity to interview for what has become my dream job. My district court clerkship – along with externships for Judge Diane Sykes and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – will prepare me to be an effective part of the Staff Attorney’s office.

During law school I found a desire to clerk in your office after externing with Judge Diane Sykes on the Seventh Circuit. That externship allowed me to work closely with Judge Sykes on several projects, including a presentation on judicial opinion writing. I also conducted research and wrote for bench memoranda and memoranda on petitions for rehearing, each about a different topic, including appellate jurisdiction, sentencing, pleading standards, First and Fourth Amendments, habeas, Fair Labor Standards Act, Federal Tort Claims Act, waiver, evidence and federal preemption. After working with Judge Sykes and her clerks, I saw the demands and rewards of clerking for a circuit judge, and I knew I wanted to clerk at that level someday. Although Judge Sykes has a policy of not writing letters of recommendation for externs, she is willing to serve as a telephone reference. She can be reached at 312-555-5555.

Beginning in 2016, I will clerk for the Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama, and afterward it would be a dream come true to serve the Seventh Circuit as a staff law clerk. I have enclosed my resume, transcript, writing samples and letters of recommendation from professors Steven Ramirez, Neil Williams and Emily Benfer. One of my writing samples is a memo about the First Amendment right to petition courts that I authored for HUD. The memo was sent to HUD Headquarters which, as a result of the memo, approved Region V’s request to take a complaint raising a novel and complex legal issue. The memo is the result of my own legal research and analysis with only minor edits by my supervisor. Additionally, I have authored several academic articles during law school which are listed on my resume and are available upon request. Thank you for your consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you.

Respectfully,

Law Student
April 3, 2016

The Honorable Anthony Rex Gabbert
Missouri Court of Appeals, Western District
1300 Oak Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64106

Dear Judge Gabbert:

I am a third-year law student at Loyola University Chicago School of Law and I am very interested in clerking for the Missouri Court of Appeals for the Western District. I learned of this position while researching clerkship opportunities in Missouri and speaking with a family friend, Judge Cynthia Martin. After graduation, I will be relocating back to Kansas City with my wife and our new daughter to be closer to family.

I am interested in this position because I believe the appellate court serves an essential role in seeking justice for the parties before the court while fostering clarity of the law for the benefit of every citizen. I am specifically interested in clerking for you because of your long-standing commitment to public interest law, which is also an interest of mine. I believe that your extensive experience in both criminal prosecutions and civil litigation for state agencies parallels my ambition to eventually pursue a career in public sector litigation. Given our shared interests, I am confident that serving as your clerk would provide phenomenal mentorship, which is my highest priority in my first position after graduation.

As you can see from my resume, I have a strong background in several areas that are relevant to the work of an appellate court judicial clerk, specifically legal writing, research, court procedure, and litigation. While working as a judicial extern for Judge Kathleen Pantle of the Circuit Court of Cook County, I learned first-hand the skills required to be an effective judicial clerk: (1) exceptional and efficient legal writing and research skills, (2) ability to prioritize numerous important assignments with varying deadlines, (3) capacity to quickly understand complex legal issues, (4) strong communication and collaboration skills, and (5) appreciation for constructive criticism. I believe my academic and professional accomplishments demonstrate my strengths in each of these areas. Currently, I am in the top ten percent of my class, and I have consistently received CALI Excellence Awards for the highest grade in at least one of my classes almost every semester, mostly for courses relevant to this position.

In legal writing and research, I have performed exceptionally well both in and out of the classroom. I have achieved high grades for every writing course, including the CALI Award in Advanced Writing for Legal Practice. I have experience drafting bench memos and opinions as a judicial extern in a court of equity, and writing legal briefs as a law clerk for Cooney & Conway. Professor Richard Michael selected me as his lead research assistant, and I spent two years leading a team of student researchers who wrote annotations to his treatise on Civil Procedure Before Trial. Another professor asked me to co-author an article analyzing a pending United States Supreme Court case, which was published last year in an ABA publication and is attached as my writing sample. Each of these experiences helped me develop a clear, articulate, and efficient writing style.
In the area of court procedure, I have taken six courses covering issues that are often litigated on appeal, including civil, criminal, international, juvenile, and administrative procedure. The two courses on criminal procedure are particularly relevant to this position because they covered constitutional issues that are the basis for most criminal appeals and petitions for post-conviction relief in criminal cases. My research for Professor Michael focused on summary judgment and other dispositive motions that often result in appeals. I also tutored first-year students in torts as a senior teaching assistant. Finally, I have completed Loyola’s Advocacy Program, which is ranked as one of the top ten advocacy programs in the country.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Enclosed are copies of my resume, most recent transcript, a writing sample, and letters of recommendation from Professor Richard Michael, Professor John Breen, and The Honorable Kathleen Pantle. I very much look forward to speaking with you about this opportunity. I understand that you are already in the process of interviewing applicants. If my application interests you, I would be available for an interview either in person or over the phone at any time.

Sincerely,

Law Student