

1Ls: Becoming a Successful Judicial Clerkship Candidate

Judicial clerkships are paid one- or two-year term positions that occur after graduation. Clerkships are one of the most rewarding forms of public service open to law school graduates. Law clerks work directly with trial or appellate court judges, either at the state or federal court level. A judicial clerkship is an extremely valuable experience for students interested in either litigation or transactional work: it provides invaluable insight into the workings of the legal system and into a wide range of legal issues. A law clerk's duties vary across courts and among judges. In general, however, judicial clerks have great responsibility and tremendous opportunity for learning.

Participation in the Texas Law Judicial Clerkship Program will make your application the best it can be and maximize your chances of obtaining a clerkship. Each student in the Judicial Clerkship Program receives one-on-one advice for perfecting their applications and strategically choosing judges to whom those applications will be sent. Students are also provided detailed information about application deadlines and procedures, which often differ from court to court and judge to judge. Program staff also manage all of the letters of recommendation, communicate regularly with judges about Texas Law applicants, and help students prepare for interviews.

What Can You Do Now to Improve Your Clerkship Application

- Select the right courses for your 2L year
- Participate in the journal write on competition
- Cultivate recommenders
- Get a writing sample
- Improve your writing
- Do interesting things

Recommended Activities for Clerkship Applicants

- Journal, and in particular, an editorial board position
- Moot court/mock trial
- Clinics
- Internships with judges or governmental legal offices
- Research assistant or teaching assistant for a professor
- TQ in the legal writing program
- Legal Research Board
- Being an officer of an organization such as Federalist Society or American Constitution Society
- Do things outside of law school that show your other interests

About Letters of Recommendation

Applicants need between two and four letters of recommendation from Texas Law faculty members and legal employers. Start thinking early about how to get the strongest possible letters. Keep these guidelines in mind as you choose your courses, interact with professors, and interact with the lawyers during your summer job:

1. Strong letters speak about you as a person. They comment about your writing, your legal analytical skills, your personality, your interests and activities, your ability to discuss the law, your ability to get your work done on time and correctly, and your ability to get along with others.
2. A faculty letter that merely says “This student received an A+ in my class” is not enough. That does not tell the judge anything he or she cannot see from the transcript. As such, you do not want a letter that says things such as:
 - a. I don’t know him well but feel he would make a good clerk.
 - b. My knowledge of her is based solely on class performance.
 - c. Based on a few encounters with him outside of the classroom setting, he seems to be a nice and talented person.
3. You want at least one letter that can address your writing, and/or your ability to do real legal work.
4. The identity of the letter writer is less important than the writer’s ability to speak about you in detail.
5. Letters from writing faculty, clinical professors, adjuncts and practicing lawyers can be excellent. However, if you are thinking about applying for the most competitive court of appeals judges (and perhaps to SCOTUS) you will need at least one tenured member of the faculty who knows you well to be your champion.

When it is time, we will help you select the best combination of letter writers to support of your application.

So, how do you get letters that do this work? Here are some ideas:

- Take small classes and seminars.
- Speak up in class.
- Write papers. Use a professor as an advisor on a student note.
- Take advantage of office hours and other opportunities to speak with professors, such as Society events, or chances to have lunch with the professor, etc.
- Volunteer to be a research assistant, even if only for a limited time or a limited project. Volunteer to be a teaching assistant. Apply to be a TQ.
- Get involved in clinics; take upper-level writing classes (such as advanced legal writing or the “Writing for the Courts” class during spring semester).
- Get involved in activities, such as moot courts, that faculty and lawyer volunteers help coach.
- Get to know the lawyers you are working with at your summer job. Talk to them about the work you are doing. Show that you are interested and that you work well with others.

Writing Samples

The most important skill for a clerk is good writing. The judge wants to know that he/she will not have to rewrite everything you write. You demonstrate this to a judge through your writing sample. The judge is looking at your writing style, your ability to write correctly, your ability to organize a legal argument, your ability to do and discuss legal research, and your ability to Bluebook correctly.

- Writing samples should ideally be about 10-15 pages. Student notes or seminar papers can be excerpted.
- Many judges prefer a writing sample that better reflects the sorts of work you would do in chambers; namely, work that you must do under time pressure and without the help of editors. Memos for upper-level legal writing courses, clinics, summer clerkships (with permission of the firm/judge, properly redacted, and indicating on the writing sample that you have received permission to use it) are often the best writing samples.
- You should not use a writing sample from your first year unless it is really all you have.