

Tips for Writing Clerkship Recommendation Letters

The letter should address four values: **diligence**, **skill in legal research and writing**, **compatibility** (getting along with co-workers), and **character** (especially maturity, reliability and discretion).

Think “Conclusion – Issue – Rule – Application to the Facts – Conclusion,” that is, about the core structure of a classic paragraph of legal argument. The letter should begin with the bottom line, that is, a conclusion: *student X* is (“outstanding,” “excellent,” etc. or “top,” “strongest,” etc.) as a candidate to clerk for the judge to whom the letter is addressed, and the recommendation can be either unadorned or adorned with some adjective or adverb (like “enthusiastically”). The two or three sentences that follow in the first paragraph supply specifics regarding the four values.

The middle paragraph offers specifics about the length of time the recommender has known *student X* and in what capacity, as well as about observed performance, especially descriptions of particular projects or achievements that tend to prove what was written in the first paragraph.

The third paragraph indicates what makes the recommender qualified to judge. It could include a brief description of the recommender’s own clerking experience, a brief description of how practice before the judge for so long leaves the writer in a position to judge past clerks and deduce what the judge wants in a clerk, etc. This paragraph should end with a fresh statement of the general conclusion.

The letter should be complete -- but brief, not more than one page.