

# Frequently Asked Questions

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- Q: What do you mean by "self-edited" writing samples?
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## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- Q: How many letters of recommendation do you require?*
- Q: Can I send more than two letters of recommendation?*
- Q: How should letters of recommendation be submitted?*
- Q: May I submit a list of references in lieu of written letters of recommendation?*
- Q: Whom should I ask to write a letter of recommendation?*
- Q: To whom should the letter of recommendation be addressed?*
- Q: My career services office prefers to submit letters directly. Is that ok?*
- Q: One of my recommenders prefers to have a phone conversation regarding my application. Is that ok?*

### **INTERVIEWS**

- Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?*
- Q: How soon after receiving my application would I be invited for an interview?*
- Q: What is the interview process? Can you describe the format of the interview? Who will I meet in the interview?*
- Q: How long will the interview take?*
- Q: Does the court pay for travel expenses for interviews?*
- Q: Do you conduct interviews by phone or video?*
- Q: Do you conduct interviews on the weekends or evenings?*
- Q: When are offers made?*

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

- Q: Do you hold on-campus interviews?*
- Q: Where can I find a posting or job description?*
- Q: How many positions do you have to fill?*
- Q: How can I obtain additional information?*

### **POSITION DESCRIPTION**

- Q: What are the qualifications for the position of staff law clerk?*
- A: Applicants must have excellent academic credentials and possess superior analytical, research, and writing skills. Law review or moot court experience is preferred.

- Q: How do the job responsibilities of staff law clerks compare to those of chambers law clerks?*
- A: Staff law clerkships combine the intellectual rigor of a chambers clerkship with the benefits of working closely with all the judges of the Seventh Circuit. Like traditional chambers clerks, the staff law clerks at the Seventh Circuit perform legal research, prepare bench memoranda, and draft merits opinions on a broad spectrum of federal cases subject to oral argument at the court. In addition to receiving the type of work typical of chambers clerkships, staff law clerks work with all the judges of the entire court rather than a single judge. They also assist the judges in resolving substantive motions that address complex questions of civil procedure or seek preliminary or emergency relief. Finally, staff law

clerks assist three-judge panels in weekly deliberative conferences on cases not subject to oral argument.

*Q: How does the salary for staff law clerks compare to that of chambers law clerks?*

A: The salary for staff law clerks follows the Court Personnel System (“CPS”) scale. The salary for chambers clerks follows the Judicial Salary Plan (“JSP”) scale. Staff law clerks with no prior legal experience start at CL27/25 on the CSP scale (roughly equivalent to grade 11 on the JSP scale). The starting salary for staff law clerks in 2023 is \$76,990. The starting salary may be adjusted depending on the applicant’s level of applicable experience.

*Q: Is there an upper limit to how many years out of law school an applicant may be?*

A: We have no upper limit, but historically, judicial clerkships are best suited to those at or near the start of their legal career.

*Q: When does the position start?*

A: Staff law clerk positions begin one week before Labor Day.

*Q: Is this a term position?*

A: Yes. Staff law clerks serve two-year terms.

#### **GENERAL APPLICATION**

*Q: Do you follow the Federal Law Clerk Hiring Plan?*

A: As of March 2018, the Seventh Circuit has adopted the new Federal Law Clerk Hiring Plan, which will impact applications for the 2021 term (applications submitted starting in 2020) and is set out below:

#### **Federal Law Clerk Hiring Plan**

Starting with students who entered law school in 2017, the application and hiring process will not begin until after a law student’s second year.

For students who entered law school in 2018 (graduating class of 2021): Judges will not seek or accept formal or informal clerkship applications, seek or accept formal or informal recommendations, conduct formal or informal interviews, or make formal or informal offers before June 16, 2020.

A judge who makes a clerkship offer will keep it open for at least 48 hours, during which time the applicant will be free to interview with other judges.

This is a two-year pilot plan. Participating judges will reconsider their participation after June 2020. A copy of the plan is posted on the OSCAR website at [https://oscar.uscourts.gov/federal\\_law\\_clerk\\_hiring\\_pilot](https://oscar.uscourts.gov/federal_law_clerk_hiring_pilot).

*Q: Do you ever hire staff law clerks mid-year?*

A: Mid-year positions become available very rarely and only as a result of unforeseen circumstances. If such a position becomes available, a message regarding the vacancy will be posted on the Seventh Circuit's website (<http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/clerkships/clerkships.htm>).

*Q: When do you begin accepting applications?*

A: On February 5, 2024, applicants may begin uploading their applications to OSCAR. Interviews will begin around July 2024, and we expect to finish extending offers about six weeks later. Applicants must update their grade sheets with final, second-year grades before we will schedule an interview.

*Q: When do you stop considering applications?*

A: We stop considering applications when the positions have been filled. We will post a message on our website when this has happened. (<http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/clerkships/clerkships.htm>).

*Q: Must I have a law degree to apply?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Must I pass a bar exam as a condition of employment?*

A: No. Bar membership is not required to become a staff law clerk. All other things being equal, staff law clerks with bar membership and staff law clerks without bar membership start at the same salary. But bar membership may come into play at a later date when a staff law clerk's eligibility for promotion to a higher salary is evaluated. Staff law clerks start at CL 27 (on the CPS scale), but cannot be promoted to CL 29 without bar membership. Eligibility for promotion to CL 29 may occur in only two circumstances: 1) when a staff law clerk is asked to stay a third year; or 2) when a staff law clerk is eligible for early promotion due to the application of early promotion credit earned as a result of legal work experience after graduating from law school. Both circumstances are extremely rare. If you think you may fall in the second category (i.e., you will be working in a legal position before joining our office as a staff law clerk and you have not taken the bar exam), you should discuss the issue with the Senior Staff Attorney.

*Q: Must I be a U.S. citizen to apply?*

A: Current appropriations law prohibits the use of appropriated funds to pay for a law clerk working in the continental U.S. unless the clerk is (1) a U.S. citizen; (2) a person from a U.S. territory who owes allegiance to the U.S.; (3) a refugee or asylee who intends to become a lawful permanent resident and then a U.S. citizen; or (4) a current lawful permanent resident who intends to seek U.S. citizenship. For more information, please visit: <http://www.uscourts.gov/Careers/CareerCitizenshipRequirements.aspx>.

*Q: What documents do you require as part of a complete application?*

A: A complete application must include a cover letter, a resume, a law school grade sheet, two self-edited writing samples, and two letters of recommendation. Final second-year grades must be submitted with your application before it will be considered. Official law school transcripts sent from the career services office of your law school will be required of those whom we interview.

*Q: How should I submit my application?*

A: We accept applications via OSCAR.

*Q: To whom should I address my cover letter?*

A: Your cover letter should be addressed to 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.

*Q: Can I send my application through the U.S. Mail?*

A: No, unless you are prohibited from submitting your application via OSCAR. Also, you may submit your letters of recommendation through the U.S. Mail, fax (703-935-4353) or email ([aubree\\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov](mailto:aubree_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov)) if they cannot be submitted through OSCAR. They should be addressed to 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.

*Q: Can I send my application via fax or e-mail?*

A: No. Applications submitted via fax or e-mail will not be considered. But letters of recommendation may be sent via fax (703-935-4353) or e-mail ([aubree\\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov](mailto:aubree_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov)) if they cannot be submitted through OSCAR. Official law school transcripts (for those who have been invited for an interview) may be sent from the career services office of your law school via e-mail ([aubree\\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov](mailto:aubree_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov)), but may not be faxed.

*Q: Can I drop off my application in person?*

A: No. Applications submitted in person will not be considered.

*Q: Can you let me know if you received my application?*

A: No. Because of the large volume of applications we receive, we do not acknowledge receipt of applications. Please do not contact us to see if your application has been received. We will not be able to return these messages.

*Q: Do all of the application materials need to be submitted together?*

A: No. The law school grade sheet and letters of recommendation can be uploaded via OSCAR after you have uploaded the rest of your application. But ordinarily your application must be complete before the Office invites you for an interview.

*Q: How long does the application and hiring process take?*

A: On February 5, 2024, applicants may begin uploading their applications to OSCAR. Interviews will begin around July 2024, and we expect to finish extending offers about six weeks later. Interviews are conducted and offers are made on a rolling basis, so the longer you wait to apply, the more you reduce your chance of receiving an offer. You can find out if we have filled all available positions by visiting our website (<http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/clerkships/clerkships.htm>).

*Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?*

A: Invitations to interview with our office are usually sent to applicants via e-mail. If we do not receive a response within a couple of days, we then call the number listed on your resume. Please do not call our office to inquire about an interview unless you have received a message from us.

*Q: Will I be notified if my application is no longer being considered? How do I know if my application is still under consideration?*

A: Rejection letters are sent to all applicants after all positions have been filled. Until you receive a rejection letter from us, your application remains under consideration. Please do not call our office to inquire about your application. You will receive no additional information.

*Q: Will you keep my application on file for consideration the following year?*

A: We keep all application materials as required by federal record-keeping statutes. But applicants must reapply with a complete application package for any subsequent positions.

#### **TRANSCRIPT**

*Q: Do you require an official transcript?*

A: We do not initially require an official transcript. A law school grade sheet uploaded via OSCAR is sufficient. If you are invited for an interview at any time, you will be required to submit an official transcript sent from the career services office of your law school.

*Q: How should grade sheets or transcripts be submitted?*

A: Law school grade sheets should be uploaded via OSCAR. Official law school transcripts (for those who have been invited for an interview) may be sent from the career services office of your law school via e-mail ([aubree\\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov](mailto:aubree_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov)) or U.S. mail (Aubree Sanders, Staff Attorney Coordinator, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629R, Chicago, IL 60604), but

may not be faxed. Official law school transcripts must come directly from the career services office of your law school. Copies will not be accepted.

### **WRITING SAMPLES**

*Q: What do you mean by "self-edited" writing samples?*

A: We prefer a writing sample that has not been edited by others. If your writing sample has been edited by others, please mention that in your application.

*Q: How many pages should a writing sample be?*

A: The ideal length is between 8 and 15 pages, double-spaced. Writing samples outside of this range are acceptable, but the further that you deviate from it, the more you risk that we will not get an appropriate sense of your writing skills or do not read your entire sample.

*Q: What kind of writing sample do you prefer?*

A: The ideal writing sample resembles a judicial opinion: It presents a set of facts, sets forth some principles of law, and applies the law to the facts to arrive at a reasoned conclusion. Law review articles tend not to meet this standard and are therefore disfavored as writing samples. Nonetheless your contribution to a law review is an important measure of your achievements. Therefore, you should list those contributions on your resume.

### **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

*Q: How many letters of recommendation do you require?*

A: Two.

*Q: Can I send more than two letters of recommendation?*

A: Yes, but only two are required.

*Q: How should letters of recommendation be submitted?*

A: Letters of recommendation should be submitted through OSCAR. If they cannot be submitted through OSCAR, they may be sent via fax (703-935-4353), e-mail (aubree\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov), or U.S. mail (addressed to 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).

*Q: May I submit a list of references in lieu of written letters of recommendation?*

A: No. Two letters of recommendation are required.

*Q: Whom should I ask to write a letter of recommendation?*

A: The best recommendations come from those who know your work well and can give detailed support. Law school professors, law firm partners, or other workplace supervisors

who meet these criteria and have worked with you recently provide useful recommendations.

*Q: To whom should the letter of recommendation be addressed?*

A: Letters should be addressed to 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.

*Q: My career services office prefers to submit letters directly. Is that ok?*

A: Because applications must be submitted through OSCAR, your career services office should submit the letters through the OSCAR system. If they cannot be submitted through OSCAR, they may be sent via fax (703-935-4353), e-mail (aubree\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov), or U.S. mail (addressed to 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).

*Q: One of my recommenders prefers to have a phone conversation regarding my application. Is that ok?*

A: We require that you select recommenders who are willing to provide written recommendations. If you have additional references who would be willing to speak with us over the phone, you may provide us with their names, but it is not required. Unsolicited phone calls are not necessary.

## **INTERVIEWS**

*Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?*

A: Invitations to interview with our office are usually sent to applicants via e-mail. If we do not receive a response from you within a couple of days, we then call the number listed on your resume. Please do not call our office inquiring about an interview if you have not received a message from us.

*Q: How soon after receiving my application would I be invited for an interview?*

A: It varies. Some applicants are invited for an interview right away, while others are not invited until later in the hiring process.

*Q: What is the interview process? Can you describe the format of the interview? Whom will I meet in the interview?*

A: Interviewees will typically meet with the Senior Staff Attorney, two Deputy Senior Staff Attorneys, two Supervisory Staff Attorneys, and two Staff Law Clerks. The interview is usually conducted in one large group and follows a traditional interview format.

*Q: How long will the interview take?*

A: The interviews typically take about two hours.

*Q: Does the court pay for travel expenses for interviews?*

A: No. All travel expenses you incur for the interview are your responsibility. The court does not reimburse candidates for any travel expenses.

*Q: Do you conduct interviews by phone or video?*

A: Yes. When invited to interview, you will have the option to interview virtually or in our offices in Chicago.

*Q: Do you conduct interviews on the weekends or evenings?*

A: No. We only conduct interviews during regular business hours, which are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. central time.

*Q: When are offers made?*

A: Offers are usually made within a couple of weeks of the interview, but it could be longer.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS**

*Q: Do you hold on-campus interviews?*

A: No.

*Q: Where can I find a posting or job description?*

A: Our posting, including a description of the staff law clerk positions, can be found on the Seventh Circuit's website: <http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/clerkships/clerkships.htm>. Postings are also submitted to career services offices of various law schools through OSCAR.

*Q: How many positions do you have to fill?*

A: We typically have about nine positions to fill each year. That number may vary from year to year, depending on our hiring needs.

*Q: How can I obtain additional information?*

A: If you have a question that is not answered by this list of Frequently Asked Questions, please e-mail Aubree Sanders, the Staff Attorney Coordinator, at [aubree\\_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov](mailto:aubree_sanders@ca7.uscourts.gov). No phone calls please.