

NALP 2016 Annual Education Conference
Creating Clerkship Connections: Judicial Networking Strategies for You and Your Students

How to Make the Best Impression as a Judicial Extern

Here are some tips to remember and follow in order to succeed as a judicial extern. These tips may seem obvious to some, but this list was compiled as a result of feedback our office has received from judicial law clerks.

Conduct Yourself in a Professional Manner

1. Dress appropriately at all times; no denim/jeans in Court or Chambers. Also no casual Friday unless you are expressly told otherwise. Always wear a suit jacket in Court.
2. Communication with the Judge must be formal, i.e. always call him/her “Your honor” or “Judge” even if he/she is informal in conversation. Always show respect.
3. Do not ask about a post-bar position or any other future opportunities during your externship.
4. Always tell the Judge if you also have another internship during the same trimester to alert him/her to potential conflicts of interest.
5. Don't rush past the law clerks on your way in to work every morning. Take the time to chat with them and get to know them. They liked you enough to hire you, so you aren't bothering them by taking a few minutes to chat every day.
6. However, the quickest way to bore Chambers staff is to talk about how stressed/busy/crazy law school is making you. They know; they all went to law school. Find something else to talk about.
7. If you are going to watch a conference or a hearing that involves your Judge, read up on the case and the issues in question beforehand. The Judge or law clerks will likely want to discuss the case with you, so you should be prepared to have a conversation on the issues. If you understand the issues going into the hearing, you will get much more out of it as well.

Questions to Ask About Your Work Assignments

1. Are there any materials you would recommend that I look at first? Code section? Specific cases?
2. Are there procedural rules or standards that affect the approach I should take? (For example, a complaint and demurrer address allegations, whereas a motion for summary judgment also requires admissible evidence in support of allegations.)
3. Do you have a model or a sample of the document/memo I should review before I begin?
4. Is there a page length or limit? (Ask this to save yourself time.)
5. Where would I find the complete file? What materials should I review for background/context? (e.g., the court docket)
6. When do you need to see/hear my findings, brief, etc.?
7. How long should I spend on this project? (This question saves you from spending twenty hours researching a particular issue if the assigning clerk believes it should only take two hours.)

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Develop Good Work Habits

1. Arrive to work early! But always call if you are running late or will be out. If you arrive 5-10 minutes late to work, you are still late.
2. Always let the law clerks know if you will be missing work.
3. Prioritize tasks to complete them on time, and don't limit yourself to just one project at a time- show that you can multitask.
4. Treat everyone with respect. Stay out of office politics. Avoid gossiping about *anyone*.
5. Communicate. Make sure all law clerks with whom you are working know which projects you are handling.
6. Keep a log of the work you are doing. You will need this information when you update your resume.
7. Bring a pen and paper everywhere in Court and Chambers. Time is precious, and you never know when someone will assign you a task or give you an important piece of information to remember.
8. There is no such thing as a "rough draft." Always turn in your best work. What will distinguish you as an extern -- for good or for bad -- is your attention to detail in your writing.
9. Always clarify and confirm the nature of the assignment before you leave the office by summarizing the assignment back to the supervising clerk/Judge: "So what you are looking for is _____ and you need this by Monday. Is that correct?"
10. You should ask questions about your work, but you should think through your questions before you ask them. When you have questions, write them down first. Being forced to write out the question may in fact help you answer it yourself. Rather than barging into the law clerk's office with your list of questions, first ask him or her if they have 15 minutes at some point in the day to go over your questions with you.
11. Finish your externship strong. Complete your assignments and send follow-up thank you letters to every person in Chambers.