

Lewis & Clark Law School

10101 S. Terwilliger Blvd.
Portland, Oregon 97219-7799
Phone 503-768-6600
Fax 503-768-6671
law.lclark.edu



Judicial Externship Supervisor Handbook

A Guide for Judges, Law Clerks, and Judicial Staff

Note: This Handbook was updated using assistance from Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI was used to make the former version of this Handbook more concise and, hopefully, reader-friendly and helpful!

Thank you for welcoming a Lewis & Clark law student into your chambers. Judicial externships are highly coveted, transformative experiences. Under your guidance, externs transition from reading law school casebooks to understanding how legal arguments, evidence, and judicial decision-making play out in real life.

Whether you are a Judge, a career Law Clerk, or a Staff Attorney acting as the daily mentor, your role is pivotal. A judicial extern is far more than an assistant; they should be treated as a junior clerk. By involving them in pre-hearing conferences, courtroom observations, chambers discussions, and opinion drafting, you provide them with a masterclass in advocacy and judicial administration.

Part 1: First-Week Chambers Orientation

Entering judicial chambers can be intimidating for law students. The quiet, highly formal environment, strict protocols, and high stakes require a thoughtful orientation on day one—especially if the extern is working in a hybrid or remote capacity.

Please consider using this checklist to structure their onboarding:

1.1. Prepare Chambers and Technology: Action before arrival.

Coordinate with your IT department to ensure the extern's computer, email, and secure research database credentials (such as Westlaw, Lexis, or court-specific docket software) are active. If your chambers operates on a hybrid schedule, verify that secure VPN and remote desktop connections are fully functional on their devices before day one.

2.2. Introduce Chambers Staff & Physical/Digital Spaces: Day 1 morning: 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM.

Introduce the extern to the judicial assistant, permanent clerks, and court security officers. Show them their physical workspace or set up a dedicated 1-on-1 video call to walk them through your

digital file structure. Ensure they understand how to access electronic dockets, pending case files, and chambers templates.

3.3. Establish the Calendar & Communication Routine: Day 1 morning: 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM.

Define their weekly schedule to meet their Externship Model's hour requirements. Provide access to the court's hearing and trial calendar. Highlight mandatory conferences, oral arguments, or trials they should attend. **Set a standing weekly check-in** with the Judge or supervising law clerk to discuss research questions and progress.

4.4. Outline Work Product Expectations: Day 1 afternoon: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM.

Explain the types of writing they will produce—most commonly **bench memoranda, statutory research guides, or initial drafts of orders/opinions**. Provide exemplary "chambers style" templates so they see exactly how you expect citations, legal standards, and statements of fact to be formatted. Clarify your editing process: Should they expect heavy redlines from a law clerk before the Judge sees a draft?

5.5. Complete the Strict Ethical Wall & Confidentiality Briefing: Day 1 afternoon: 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM.

Conduct a deep dive into judicial ethics, conflicts of interest, and chambers confidentiality. Externs must understand that **nothing discussed in chambers ever leaves chambers**. Explicitly outline rules regarding ex parte communications, social media use, and keeping their required weekly reports entirely clear of sensitive, non-public, or case-identifying information.

Part 2: Structuring the Educational Experience

To maximize the academic value of the externship, we ask judicial mentors to focus on three pillars:

1. Active Courtroom & Chambers Integration

- **The Power of Debriefing:** Don't just have the extern watch a hearing or trial passively. Invite them into chambers before the hearing to discuss the briefs, and meet with them afterward. Ask them: *Which oral arguments were effective? Which briefs were the most persuasive? How did the courtroom dynamics affect the outcome?*
- **Virtual Chamber Presence:** If your court holds hearings via Zoom or if the extern works remotely, ensure they are invited to the virtual hearing. Schedule a brief phone call or video sync immediately following the stream to debrief.
- **Observe Multiple Stages:** If possible, let the extern observe different phases of the judicial process—from scheduling and settlement conferences to motion practice, jury selection, and trials.

2. High-Yield Writing Assignments

- **Bench Memoranda:** Have the extern analyze a pending motion, research the applicable law, and draft a memo summarizing the facts, the party arguments, and a recommended ruling.
- **Opinion Drafting:** For advanced students, assign a portion of an order or opinion. This challenges them to write in a neutral, authoritative voice—a massive departure from the persuasive writing they learn in their first-year courses.

Part 3: Providing Effective Feedback in Chambers

Judicial writing requires a high degree of precision and neutrality. Because legal writing is highly personal, feedback can sometimes feel discouraging to students. Using a structured pedagogical approach keeps feedback constructive.

- **Provide Clear Benchmarks:** When returning a draft with heavy edits or redlines, explain the *why* behind your changes. Is a correction due to a stylistic preference of the Judge, or is it a substantive legal error?
- **Praise Analytical Precision:** Go beyond *"good job."* Point out specific strengths: *"Your synthesis of the multi-factor test in Section II was highly accurate and made drafting the final order much easier."*
- **Address the Tone:** Law students are trained to write as advocates. Use your feedback to help them strip away argumentative adverbs (*"clearly," "obviously"*) and replace them with objective, analytical phrasing.

The Feedback Conversation Structure

When sitting down (or sharing a screen) to review a draft with an extern, try this flow:

1. **Acknowledge effort and structure:** *"You did a great job organizing the facts chronologically."*
2. **Point out areas needing refinement:** *"In the analysis section, you relied heavily on a case that was recently distinguished in this district. Let's look at why that matters."*
3. **Encourage self-evaluation:** *"What did you find most challenging when trying to reconcile these two conflicting statutes?"*
4. **Prescribe the next step:** *"I'd like you to spend another hour looking at the legislative history of that 2022 amendment, then update Section III."*

Part 4: Mid-Externship & Final Evaluations

Because externships are credit-bearing courses, your evaluation of the student's work determines whether they receive academic credit.

Key Evaluation Criteria for Judicial Externs:

- **Analytical Rigor:** Their ability to identify core legal issues and synthesize complex statutory or case law.
- **Writing Quality:** Their clarity, accuracy, neutrality, and attention to detail (such as Bluebook citation formatting).
- **Research Competency:** Their efficiency and thoroughness using digital legal research platforms.
- **Ethics & Professionalism:** Strict adherence to chambers rules, confidentiality, and professional boundaries.
- **Receptivity to Guidance:** Their response to redlines and their ability to apply critiques to subsequent drafts.

To make this easy at the end of the term, we suggest keeping a brief, private document on your computer to jot down quick notes about the projects the extern works on and how their writing progresses over the semester.

Part 5: Contact & Support

We are always available if you have questions or want to discuss anything related to your extern or the Externship Program. Please do not wait for the mid-externship or the final evaluation period to address a problem. If an extern struggles with attendance, fails to meet deadlines, or has difficulty understanding judicial ethics, do not wait until the end of the term to let us know.

Director of Externships & Practica: Libby Davis; eadavis@lclark.edu; 503-768-6610

Program Coordinator: Alyssa Salstrom; akwarren@lclark.edu

Thank you for your invaluable contribution to the education of Lewis & Clark law students!