

Use disciplined claim practices. Preserve accuracy, connect evidence to the issue, and avoid shortcuts that create contradictions or unsupported conclusions.



THE CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE

TELL THE TRUTH CLEARLY AND SUPPORT WHAT MATTERS

More pages do not automatically make a stronger claim. Relevant, credible, and internally consistent evidence is more useful than volume.

PRACTICAL CLAIM CONDUCT

WHAT HELPS AND WHAT HURTS

DO

DON'T

01 ACCURACY	✓ BE SPECIFIC AND CONSISTENT Use the most accurate dates, locations, units, people, symptoms, and functional examples you can provide. Explain genuine uncertainty.	✗ DO NOT INVENT, EXAGGERATE, OR MINIMIZE Unsupported detail and conflicting accounts can damage credibility. Describe typical functioning, including meaningful variation.
02 EVIDENCE	✓ MATCH EVIDENCE TO A DISPUTED ELEMENT Know whether the record needs a diagnosis, stressor evidence, a medical link, or clearer evidence of current impairment.	✗ DO NOT COLLECT DOCUMENTS WITHOUT A PURPOSE Duplicates and unrelated records can obscure the point. Identify what each submission helps establish.
03 STRESSOR	✓ USE THE CORRECT STRESSOR RULE Combat, fear of hostile activity, personal assault or MST, former POW status, and other events have different evidentiary paths.	✗ DO NOT ASSUME EVERY STRESSOR NEEDS THE SAME PROOF A buddy statement is not universally required, and an absence of an official report is not always the end of the inquiry.
04 STATEMENTS	✓ USE LAY EVIDENCE FOR OBSERVABLE FACTS Personal and witness statements can describe events, behavioral changes, symptoms, and effects the writer directly observed.	✗ DO NOT TURN OBSERVATION INTO A MEDICAL CONCLUSION A lay statement generally should not claim clinical expertise the writer does not have.
05 MEDICAL LINK	✓ LOOK FOR A REASONED NEXUS WHEN THE LINK IS DISPUTED A useful opinion identifies the relevant stressor and evidence, then explains why the current PTSD is connected.	✗ DO NOT ASSUME A PRIVATE NEXUS LETTER IS ALWAYS REQUIRED VA may obtain an examination or opinion. The need for additional medical evidence depends on the existing record.
06 C&P EXAM	✓ ATTEND OR PROMPTLY ADDRESS SCHEDULING PROBLEMS Arrive prepared to discuss history, symptoms, impairment, treatment, and variation accurately. A claim exam is an evaluation, not treatment.	✗ DO NOT ASSUME RECORDS HANDED TO THE EXAMINER ENTER THE FILE VA states that the examiner cannot submit your records for you. Upload or submit new non-VA records through an accepted channel.
07 DEVELOPMENT	✓ MONITOR REQUESTS AND PRESERVE CONFIRMATIONS Check VA.gov and your mail. Save copies of submissions, upload confirmations, examination notices, and correspondence.	✗ DO NOT IGNORE A REQUEST OR MISSED EXAMINATION Respond by the stated date. If you cannot attend, contact the scheduling office promptly and document what happened.
08 DECISION	✓ READ THE ENTIRE DECISION LETTER Review the reasons, favorable findings, evidence list, rating, effective date, and available review options.	✗ DO NOT CHOOSE A REVIEW PATH BEFORE IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM The best next step depends on whether the issue is missing evidence, a factual or legal error, or disagreement with the evaluation or date.

FOUR THINGS THAT ARE NOT UNIVERSAL REQUIREMENTS

USE WHAT THE CASE
ACTUALLY NEEDS

≠ PRIVATE NEXUS LETTER

≠ BUDDY STATEMENT

≠ C&P EXAMINATION

≠ EVERY POSSIBLE RECORD

DO NOT SACRIFICE TREATMENT FOR CLAIM STRATEGY. Seek appropriate care and follow treatment decisions made with your health professionals. A benefits claim is not a substitute for care.

