

FWD ASSIST HQ / CLAIM TOOLKIT / NO. 01

The Buddy Statement Pack

Three examples, the one mistake that sinks most of them, and a page you can hand to the person writing yours.

Almost everyone writes their first buddy statement the same way, and it is the way that does the least good. Not because they got the facts wrong. Because they wrote about the wrong thing.

This pack shows you three versions of the same statement. One that most people write. One that actually helps. One that can hurt. Then it gives you a single page to hand your buddy so they do not have to guess.

WHAT IS IN HERE

1. Why most buddy statements do not do much
2. The three examples, side by side
3. The page you hand your buddy
4. A quick check before you send it

This is general education about how to describe what someone saw. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or a promise about any claim result. Nobody can promise you an outcome. If you want help with your claim, a VA-accredited representative can assist you free of charge. FWD Assist HQ is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs or any government agency.

Start here

VA already has your diagnosis. What VA does not have is somebody who watched it happen.

That is the whole job of a buddy statement. Your buddy is not there to say you are sick. They are there to say what they saw with their own eyes, and when.

The rule behind this is simple. A statement counts when it describes things an ordinary person can see and describe without special training. Your buddy watched you sleep in a hallway. That counts. Your buddy did not go to medical school. So when they write that you have a condition, or how bad it is, they are reaching past what they can speak to, and that part is worth much less than the thing they actually watched.

Who counts as a buddy

Anybody who saw something with their own eyes. It does not have to be somebody you served with. A spouse who has watched you since you got home, a coworker who covers for you, a brother, a neighbor, the person who drives you places now. What matters is that they observed it, not what their relationship to you is. Two or three short statements from different parts of your life usually do more than one long one from a single person.

THE ONE LINE TO REMEMBER

Describe the moment, not the condition.

If your buddy writes a sentence that a doctor would have to sign off on, cut it. If they write a sentence that starts with a date and a place, keep it.

What that changes in practice

Same information. Different sentence. The right column is what a reader can actually use.

Everything in the right column is somebody else's memory. Yours will have different facts in it, and the only ones that belong in a statement are the ones that person actually saw. What to copy is the shape: one specific thing, where, and roughly when.

Instead of writing	Write
He has bad anxiety	He would not sit with his back to the door at chow
It affects his daily life	He stopped coming to the weekly poker game after March
His knee is shot	He took the stairs one at a time, holding the rail, both hands
He suffers a lot	I heard him up walking the hallway most nights that winter

The right column is not fancier writing. It is just smaller. One thing, one time, that somebody actually watched.

And one rule about editing

If a statement comes back with a line in it that will not help, do not fix it yourself. A signed statement belongs to the person who signed it, and a reader can usually tell when somebody else has been through it. Go back, say which part a stranger cannot use and why, and let them write it again and re-sign. That is slower and it is the only version that holds up.

The three versions

Same veteran. Same condition. Same friend writing it. Only the approach changes.

VERSION 1 / WHAT MOST PEOPLE WRITE

"I served with John. He has PTSD really bad and it affects his daily life. He is not the same guy I knew over there. He deserves to be rated for it."

Why it does not do much

Read it again and ask what a stranger learns. There is no date. No place. Nothing anybody watched happen. It says what is wrong with John, which his friend is not able to say, and it argues for a result, which is not his friend's call. Everything in it is already in the file or is somebody's opinion. It adds nothing new.

VERSION 2 / THE ONE THAT ACTUALLY HELPS

"I shared a room with John at Bagram from June 2011 to March 2012. After the mortar attack on August 4th, he stopped sleeping in the room. I found him sitting in the hallway with his back against the wall at least three nights a week for the rest of the deployment. He told me he could not be somewhere he was not able to see the door. In February he came back into the room during a maintenance drill and walked out again within about two minutes. He was sweating and his hands were shaking."

What changed

- There are dates and a place. Somebody can line this up with the rest of the file.
- There is a specific event, and then a second one months later.
- There is a frequency. Three nights a week is different from once.
- It is all first hand. Sat. Found. Watched. Heard him say.
- It never once says what John has or what John should get.

VERSION 3 / THE ONE THAT CAN HURT YOU

"John has severe PTSD, easily 70 percent worth. He cannot hold a job and should be getting TDIU. I have known him fifteen years and I am telling you he qualifies."

Why this one backfires

Your buddy is not a doctor and is not the person who decides your rating. When a statement reaches for a percentage or names a benefit, it reads as coached. And once a reader doubts one part of a statement, that doubt spreads to the parts that were good. Version 3 is worse than writing nothing, because it can pull down the rest of your evidence with it.

The pattern in one look

	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
Dates and place	No	Yes	No
Something watched	No	Yes	No
How often	No	Yes	No
Stays in their lane	No	Yes	No
Net effect	Neutral	Helps	Can hurt

IF YOU ONLY FIX ONE THING

Read the statement through for any sentence that says what is wrong with you or what you should get. If you find one, go back to the writer, say why a reader cannot use that part, and let them write it again and re-sign it. Do not cross anything out yourself. A signed statement belongs to the person who signed it.

Hand this page to your buddy

This page and the next one are the handoff. Print both, text photos of both, or email both. Your buddy does not need the rest of this pack.

You have been asked to write a statement for someone. Thank you. Here is the whole job in four questions. Answer them in your own words. It does not have to sound official. Plain is better.

1. How do you know them, and when?

Unit, ship, base, job, or how you met. Roughly what months or years.

2. What did you actually see or hear?

One or two specific times. Where you were and about when it happened. Just what you watched, not what you figured was going on.

3. How often did that happen?

Once? Most weeks? Every night that winter? A rough count is fine.

4. If you knew them before, what is different now?

Something concrete. Stopped doing something. Started doing something.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE

What you think their diagnosis is. What percentage they should get. What benefit they deserve. None of that helps, and it can make a reader doubt the parts you did see. Just what you saw. That is the part nobody else in the world can give.

What a good one looks like

The second of the two handoff pages. It shows the shape, and it has the lines to sign.

THE SHAPE, NOT THE WORDS

Four sentences will do it. Every bracket below is something only you know, and nobody can fill them in for you.

"I [how you knew them] at [where] from [when] to [when]. [The specific thing you saw them do, and roughly when it started.] I saw it myself [how often, even roughly]. [What they were like before, next to what they are like now.]"

Who and when, what you saw, how often, and what changed. If you can fill those four brackets honestly, that is a complete statement. If you cannot fill one, leave it out rather than guessing at it.

LAST, AND PEOPLE FORGET THIS

Sign it, date it, and put a phone number or email on it in case VA needs to reach you. Then give it back to the person who asked. They will submit it. You do not have to send it anywhere yourself. Everything in it has to be true and has to be yours: a false statement to VA is a federal crime.

THIS IS FOR

WRITTEN BY

DATE

Signed

Printed name and date

Phone or email

Before you send it

Run down this list. It takes two minutes and it catches most of what goes wrong.

- ☐ Every claim in it is something the writer saw or heard themselves.
- ☐ There is at least one date or rough time frame.
- ☐ There is at least one place.
- ☐ There is at least one specific incident, not just a general description.
- ☐ There is some sense of how often it happened.
- ☐ Nothing in it names a diagnosis, a percentage, or a benefit.
- ☐ It is signed and dated by the person who wrote it.
- ☐ Their contact information is on it in case VA follows up.
- ☐ You kept a copy for yourself before sending it.

The form

VA has a form built for this. It is VA Form 21-10210, called the Lay/Witness Statement. The current edition is dated July 2024. You can download it from va.gov, or submit your statement through the online tool there. Mailing instructions are printed on the form itself. Check va.gov before you send anything, because forms and addresses change.

You do not have to use the form. A signed, dated letter can work. If your buddy writes a letter instead, have them end it with this line before they sign: "I declare under penalty of perjury that the above statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge." The form just puts the identifying information where VA expects it, and it prints that warning for you.

Every statement has to be true and has to be the writer's own. Knowingly making a false statement to VA is a federal crime under 18 U.S.C. 1001. Never write a statement for somebody else to sign.

NOBODY SHOULD CHARGE YOU TO FILE

Help from an accredited Veterans Service Officer is free. Always. Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and your state or county veterans service office all have accredited representatives and none of them charges you. The search is at va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/find-rep.

Nobody may charge you a fee for helping with your claim before VA issues its first decision on it. That rule is 38 USC 5904(c)(1). After the first decision an accredited agent or attorney may charge, and 38 CFR 14.636 sets the limits, measured against past-due benefits, which means the back pay owed for the stretch before the decision: a fee not over 20 percent of that is presumed reasonable if that person represented you through the date of the decision, and a fee over one third is presumed unreasonable. Only an accredited agent or attorney may charge you anything.

So if somebody who is not accredited offers to file for you, wants money up front, or wants a cut, walk away and report them to the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

Where this is written down

Competent lay evidence is defined in 38 CFR 3.159 as evidence not requiring specialized education, training, or experience, provided by somebody with personal knowledge who conveys matters a lay person can observe and describe. That definition is why this pack pushes you toward what somebody watched rather than what somebody concluded. How a statement that strays past it gets weighed is a matter of practice, not something 3.159 spells out.

Form 21-10210 and the online submission tool: va.gov. Regulation text: ecfr.gov, Title 38, Part 3, section 3.159.

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Current as of October 2026. Rates, forms, and procedures change. Check for a newer version before you rely on this.

If working on this is bringing things up, the Veterans Crisis Line is 988 then press 1, or text 838255. Family members can call it too.