

The Two Week Record

For a mental health exam. The person who decides your claim will never meet you. They meet the report. Here is how to make one day carry a whole year, without saying a single thing that is not true.

An exam is one appointment on one morning. The rating specialist who decides your claim almost never meets you. They read what the examiner wrote down.

So the question is not how you come across. The question is whether the day gets written down accurately, and whether anything exists in the file to show what the rest of the year looked like.

WHAT IS IN HERE

1. What the exam is actually for
2. Why a good day on the wrong morning is a real problem
3. The two-week record you bring with you
4. A check before you walk in

This is general education. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or a promise about any claim result. Nobody can promise you an outcome. A VA-accredited representative can help you with your claim at no cost. FWD Assist HQ is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs or any government agency.

Who this is really for

You are not being evaluated. You are being written down.

The examiner is not treating you and is not deciding your claim. Their job is to document, in a report, the answers to specific questions the rating specialist needs. That specialist reads the report. In almost every case, that is the only version of you they will ever see.

Which means the failure that hurts people is not saying the wrong thing. It is being described incompletely, and having no way for anybody to know that.

THE ONE LINE TO REMEMBER

Answer for the year, not for the morning.

Not because you should exaggerate. Because the honest answer to "how are you doing" on a Tuesday is not the honest answer to "how have you been".

The rule is on your side here

One scoping note first, because it matters. The rule quoted below is the one that governs mental disorders. If your exam is for a back, a knee, migraines, breathing or hearing, a different set of rules applies and your condition's own toolkit covers exam day for it. Everything on this page is written for a mental health exam.

The regulation does not tell the rating agency to score how you seemed at one appointment. It tells them to consider how often symptoms happen, how severe they are, how long they last, how long the good stretches run, and how well you function during those good stretches.

That is a description of a pattern over time. A single exam cannot show a pattern by itself. Something has to supply it, and if you do not, nothing will.

The good day problem

This is the most common way an accurate exam still produces an incomplete record.

HOW IT HAPPENS

You slept. You showered and put on a clean shirt because it is an appointment. You took your medication. You have been bracing for this for three weeks, so you are running on adrenaline. Somebody asks how you are doing and you say fine, because that is what people say, and because today you mostly are.

Nobody lied. The report is accurate about that morning. It is just that the morning was not representative, and there is nothing in the file to say so.

The same honest answer, two ways

The third column is somebody else's year. Yours will have different facts in it, and the only ones that belong in an exam room are the ones that are true for you. What to copy is the shape: answer for the stretch, not for this morning.

The question	Answering for the morning	Answering for the year
How is your sleep?	I slept last night.	Last night was one of the better ones. Most weeks I am up two or three nights until three or four.
Do you get along with people?	Yeah, I am fine.	I do all right one on one. I have not been to a family thing since Christmas. I left my last two jobs partly over blowups with supervisors.
How often does that happen?	Sometimes.	Three or four times a week. It was closer to daily in the spring.
Are you working?	Yes.	Yes, and I have called out nine days in the last two months, and my supervisor has stopped putting anything in writing, which worries me more.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT PERFORMING

Every answer in the right column is true and none of them make anything sound worse than it is. They are longer because they include how often and how long. Do not describe symptoms you do not have. An examiner who catches one exaggeration reasonably doubts everything else, and that costs far more than it gains.

Two weeks, before you go

Print this. Fill in a line whenever something happens. Bring it with you and hand it over, or use it to answer from.

NAME

DATE

You do not need to write much. A date and a few words is enough. The point is that on exam day you are not trying to remember six months while somebody watches you.

Date	Sleep	What happened	How long

Also worth noting somewhere

Days you called out of work or left early. Things you used to do and stopped. Anybody who has said something to you about a change in you. Those are the details that turn a symptom list into a picture of a life.

Before you walk in

- ☐ I have two weeks of notes with me.
- ☐ I am ready to answer with how often and how long, not just yes or no.
- ☐ I have thought about my worst weeks, not only this week.
- ☐ I know the difference between a good day and a typical one, for me.
- ☐ I am not going to describe anything I do not actually have.
- ☐ I am not going to minimize either, out of habit or pride.
- ☐ If somebody close to me has noticed changes, that is written down somewhere in the file.
- ☐ I know this exam is one piece of evidence and not the whole decision.

IF THE EXAM GOES BADLY

It happens. The examiner is rushed, or the appointment runs ten minutes, or you freeze and answer in one word. The exam does not have the last word. It is weighed against your treatment records, your own statements, and statements from people who know you. Write down what happened while it is fresh, and take it to an accredited representative.

The appointment itself

TWO THINGS WORTH KNOWING

If you cannot make it, call and reschedule rather than missing it. Missing one without good cause is worse than most people think: on an original compensation claim it means the claim is rated on whatever is already in the file, and on a claim for increase or a supplemental claim for something previously denied, the regulation says the claim shall be denied.

Examiners often will not take papers from you. That is not personal and it is not a reason to leave the record at home. Submit it yourself so it is in the file no matter what happens in the room.

HOW THIS REACHES VA

Handing a page to somebody in an appointment is not the same as putting it in your file. To be sure the two week record lands, submit it yourself.

VA Form 21-10210, Lay/Witness Statement (July 2024 version), is the form built for a written statement from you or from somebody else. You can upload it through your account at va.gov or mail it. Form numbers and versions change, so check the current one first. The page for this form is va.gov/find-forms/about-form-21-10210 and every VA form has one at the same address with its own number on the end.

Afterward you can request a copy of the exam report through the records request tool at va.gov, VA Form 20-10206, the Freedom of Information Act or Privacy Act Request (August 2023 version). If the exam did not reflect your situation, you can submit your own written statement saying what happened in the room. Do that promptly and tell your representative.

Keep a copy of what you sent and how you sent it.

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

The requirement that the rating agency consider the frequency, severity, and duration of symptoms, the length of remissions, and your capacity for adjustment during remissions is in 38 CFR 4.126. Mental health conditions are rated on occupational and social impairment under 38 CFR 4.130.

Regulation text: [ecfr.gov](https://www.ecfr.gov), Title 38, Part 4, sections 4.126 and 4.130. Both govern mental disorders. What happens when an examination is missed is in 38 CFR 3.655. Confirm current forms at va.gov.

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Current as of October 2026. Regulations 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.