

— FWD ASSIST HQ —

FIELD GUIDE

Write Your Personal Statement (VA Form 21-4138)

Write a clear, credible personal statement in your own words on VA Form 21-4138.



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A FWD Assist HQ Field Guide

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This guide is education, not representation. It explains how part of the VA system works so you can handle your own business with confidence. It is not legal or claims advice, and reading it does not create any representative relationship between you and the author. The author is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and nothing here is endorsed by the VA.

This guide prints no live VA dollar figures and no rating percentages on purpose, because they change. Before you make a decision based on any number, check the current figure at va.gov. No book can promise you a rating; the evidence in your file decides the result. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Officer is always free. Copyright 2026 FWD Assist HQ. All rights reserved.

In crisis? Call the **Veterans Crisis Line**: dial **988**, then press **1**. You can also text **838255** or chat online at veteranscrisisline.net. It is free, confidential, and available 24/7.

Write Your Personal Statement (VA Form 21-4138)

Write a clear, credible personal statement in your own words on VA Form 21-4138.

Companion to *VA Disability Primer*.

This is general education, not legal or claims advice, and not guidance for your specific claim. It cannot promise you a rating or an outcome, and no one can. For help with your own claim, see a free accredited representative (see [Get Free, Accredited Help](#) at the back). Nothing here creates a representative relationship.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

THE BEST WAY TO USE THIS GUIDE

The strongest position is to be your own informed advocate and to work with a free accredited representative. An accredited Veterans Service Organization, such as the DAV, VFW, American Legion, or a county or state veterans office, helps at no charge. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can help too. They can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim, and after that they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide is here so you understand your own situation and can work with them as a full partner instead of handing it over blind. If you'd rather handle this yourself, and you're comfortable doing that, the guide walks you through every step. Either way, you stay in control.

The Outcome and What You Need Before You Start

The outcome: By the end of this guide you'll have written and submitted a personal statement on VA Form 21-4138. In your own words, it describes your symptoms and what they stop you from doing.

This guide prepares you for the task. It doesn't and can't promise a rating, a percentage, or an outcome. The evidence in your file decides the result.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ The current VA Form 21-4138 from va.gov/forms/21-4138, or the online version.
- ☐ Notes on your symptoms: how often, how bad, how long, and what they limit.
- ☐ Your records, so your statement stays consistent with them.
- ☐ The condition or conditions the statement will cover.

When to start: Start once you can describe your symptoms plainly. A short, honest statement written when you're clear-headed beats a long one written in a rush before a deadline.

Start Here: The Basics

A personal statement on VA Form 21-4138, Statement in Support of Claim, is your own testimony. It's lay evidence, and VA has to consider it along with the medical evidence. It describes what you live with: your symptoms, how often they happen, how bad they get, how long they last, and what they stop you from doing. It supports your medical evidence. It doesn't replace it. VA also accepts a signed statement on plain paper, and you can use VA Form 21-10210, Lay/Witness Statement, for your own account or for a buddy's. This guide walks you through writing one.

Where this is written down: 38 U.S.C. § 5107(b); 38 CFR § 3.159(a)(2).

The Steps

STEP 1

Get the current VA Form 21-4138.

How. Download the current edition (July 2024 as of October 2026) from va.gov/forms/21-4138, or use the online version on that page. On paper you can type into it or print and write by hand.

Done when you have the current form in hand or open online.

STEP 2

Choose the condition or conditions the statement will cover.

How. Decide what this statement is about. A focused statement on one or two conditions is easier for a rater to use than one that tries to cover everything. You can write a separate statement for each condition.

Done when you know which conditions the statement addresses.

STEP 3

Describe each symptom in functional terms.

How. For each symptom, give how often it happens, how bad it gets, how long it lasts, and what it stops you from doing. Turn pain into what you can't do. For example: "I can stand about an hour before I have to sit." Describe flare-ups too: how often they come, how long they last, and what you can't do during them.

Don't stop at "it hurts." Pain counts. For joints and muscles, the rating rules treat pain that limits use as part of the disability. The limit is what shows the rater how much it affects you.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 4.40; 38 CFR § 4.59.

Done when each symptom is described with how often, how bad, how long, and what it limits.

STEP 4

Stay with what you saw and felt.

How. Write what you experience and observe: what happened, when it started, what you've noticed since, and what you can't do now. You can say when a symptom began and what you were doing when it did. Leave complex diagnoses and medical causes to the medical evidence.

Don't write medical conclusions about a complex condition, such as naming a diagnosis or a cause a doctor would have to decide. Plain description of what you lived is the lay evidence VA can use.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.159(a)(1) and (a)(2).

Done when your statement describes your experience, not medical conclusions.

STEP 5

Keep it consistent with your records.

How. Check your statement against your medical and service records. If something in the records is wrong or missing, say so plainly and explain.

Don't exaggerate, and don't play anything down. VA weighs your statement against the rest of the record, and a statement that conflicts with it carries less weight.

Done when your statement and your records tell the same story, or you've explained any difference.

STEP 6

Write it in your own words.

How. Use plain language and your own voice. An honest, imperfect statement in your words is worth more than polished text that isn't yours.

Don't let anyone else, or an AI tool, write what you say. You sign a certification that the statements are true and correct to the best of your knowledge. Every fact in it has to be yours.

Done when the statement reads as your own account.

STEP 7

Sign and date the form.

How. Sign and date VA Form 21-4138 in the signature block. Your signature is required. It certifies that the statements are true and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief, and the form warns that the law penalizes knowingly false statements.

Where this is written down: VA Form 21-4138 (July 2024), certification and penalty notice.

Done when the form is signed and dated.

STEP 8

Submit it and keep a copy.

How. If your claim is still pending, upload it through va.gov/claim-or-appeal-status. You can also send it with a new claim, use the online version of the form, or give it to your accredited representative. By mail, the form's address is Department of Veterans Affairs, Evidence Intake Center, PO Box 4444, Janesville, WI 53547-4444. Keep a copy.

Done when the statement is submitted and you've saved a copy.

Recap Checklist

This is the page to photograph and keep with you. Tick each line as you finish it.

RUN THE WHOLE TASK FROM HERE

- ☐ Got the current VA Form 21-4138 (or the online version).
- ☐ Chose the condition or conditions the statement covers.
- ☐ Described each symptom and flare-up: how often, how bad, how long, and what it limits.
- ☐ Stayed with what you saw and felt, with no medical conclusions about complex conditions.
- ☐ Kept the statement consistent with your records, without exaggerating or downplaying.
- ☐ Wrote it in your own words.
- ☐ Signed and dated the form.
- ☐ Submitted it and kept a copy.

Reminder: rules and rates change. Check any current figure at va.gov. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim.

After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide prepared you for the task. The evidence in your file decides the result.

Get Free, Accredited Help

For anything about your own claim, talk to an accredited representative. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Free help is available through Veterans Service Organizations such as the DAV, VFW, and American Legion, and through county and state veterans offices.

To find one near you, visit va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative. Representation begins only when you sign VA Form 21-22 (for a Veterans Service Organization) or 21-22a (for an individual agent or attorney). With one rare exception for a single unpaid case, only accredited people can represent you before the VA, and only an accredited agent or attorney can charge you a fee. Nothing in this guide creates that relationship.

A warning about claim sharks. Anyone who offers to file your initial claim for a fee, or who guarantees you a rating or a percentage, is selling something you shouldn't buy. Accredited Veterans Service Organizations help at no charge, and accredited claims agents and attorneys may charge only after VA issues its initial decision, within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Report predatory companies to the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

Keep Going: The Full Guide

This field guide is the short, do-this-now companion to the book *VA Disability Primer*. See every FWD Assist HQ title that is out now at fwdassisthq.com/books.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

About the Author

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J. Erickson is a service-disabled Air Force veteran. He served as a military firefighter and as a veteran service officer, where he spent years walking veterans through the same claims process he writes about now. He holds an MBA and writes plain-language guides for veterans who want to understand the system without a translator.

He writes the For the Rest of Us series at fwdassisthq.com. This guide is published by FWD Assist HQ as a veteran education resource. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.