

The VA Claim Readiness Checklist

28 things to have squared away before you touch VA.gov

A VA rater never meets you — they meet your file. Work through this list before you file anything. Every box you can't check is a preparation task, not a reason to quit. Print it. Tape it up. Check the boxes.

PART 1 — KNOW YOUR CONDITIONS

- I have written a complete list of every condition, injury, and symptom related to my service — big and small.
- I have a current diagnosis, in writing, for every condition I plan to claim (symptoms alone are not ratable).
- For each condition, I can point to when it started or what event/exposure in service caused or aggravated it.
- I have considered secondary conditions — problems caused or worsened by an already service-connected condition.
- I have checked whether any of my conditions are presumptive (PACT Act, Gulf War, toxic exposure, etc.).
- I am tracking symptoms in a daily log: what, how bad (0–10), and what it stopped me from doing.

PART 2 — GET YOUR RECORDS

- I have requested (or have) my complete Service Treatment Records (STRs).
- I have requested (or have) my military personnel file, deployment records, and awards list.
- I have my VA medical records / Blue Button report (if I use VA healthcare).
- I have records from civilian providers who treated my conditions.
- I have actually READ my records and flagged every entry that mentions my claimed conditions.
- My records are organized in one binder or digital folder a stranger could navigate.

PART 3 — BUILD YOUR EVIDENCE

- Each condition has evidence in three areas: current diagnosis · connection to service · current severity.
- I know where my evidence is thin, and I have a plan to fill each gap before filing.
- I have identified people (spouse, battle buddies, coworkers) who witnessed my conditions and asked them for statements.
- I have drafted a personal statement for each major condition: what happened, what the symptoms are, how they affect work and life.
- My statements are accurate and complete — no minimizing, no exaggerating.
- I have seen a provider recently enough that my file reflects my CURRENT severity, not how I was five years ago.

PART 4 — UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS

- I understand what "service connection" requires and how VA combined ratings (VA math) work.
- I have filed an Intent to File (or understand what it does and when to use it).
- I know what a C&P; exam is, what examiners are evaluating, and that vague answers undersell real conditions.
- I know the difference between filing on my own, BDD (if still serving, 90–180 days out), and using an accredited rep.
- I understand the claim stages on VA.gov and that status moving "backward" is normal.

PART 5 — FINAL READINESS

- Every claimed condition has its evidence labeled and cross-referenced in my binder/folder.
- Someone I trust has reviewed my file for gaps and contradictions.
- I know when to bring in an accredited VSO, claims agent, or attorney — and how to find one (VA OGC accreditation search).
- I am filing because my file is ready — not because I finally got around to it.
- I have copies of EVERYTHING I am about to submit.

Pre-Separation Documentation Checklist

The evidence window closes when you ETS. Use it while you have it.

12+ MONTHS OUT

- Report EVERY symptom and injury at medical appointments — if it isn't in the record, it didn't happen.
- Book appointments for the conditions you've been toughing out. Start the paper trail now.
- Begin a symptom log. Two minutes a day.
- Request a copy of your current STRs and read them. Flag gaps between what you've experienced and what's documented.

6 MONTHS OUT

- Follow up on every flagged gap: get undocumented conditions seen and documented.
- Identify buddy-statement writers while everyone is still in one place — collect contact info.
- Learn the BDD program (file 90–180 days before separation with a complete file).
- Attend TAP/transition briefings and ask specifically about disability claim preparation.

90 DAYS OUT

- Take your separation physical seriously — report everything, minimize nothing. "I'm fine" costs veterans dearly.
- File BDD if eligible and your file is ready; otherwise plan your post-separation filing sequence.
- Get final copies of ALL records before you lose easy access: STRs, personnel file, evaluations, awards.
- Save copies of orders, deployment records, and exposure documentation (burn pits, chemicals, noise).

What's next? Every unchecked box is taught, step by step, inside the **Standfast Claims Academy** — 13 modules, 180+ lessons, and every template and tracker you need. Veteran-built.

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