

ANATOMY OF A COMPLETE CLAIM FILE

Organize the file around the questions the VA must answer, not around the order records arrived.



EVIDENCE

BEST STRUCTURE

One condition at a time

NAVIGATION

Overview plus labeled exhibits

FINAL CONTROL

Receipt and retained copy

READ FIRST

A complete file gives the reviewer a clear route from the claimed condition to the legal theory, the supporting evidence, and the requested decision. Each document should have a job.

FILE LAYER 01

FRONT SHEET: THE CLAIM OVERVIEW

A

Conditions claimed

Use a clear condition name and identify whether the request is initial, increase, secondary, or another valid claim type.

B

Theory for each condition

State direct, presumptive, secondary causation, aggravation, increase, or the other applicable route.

C

Evidence map

List the documents that support each required element and use the same filenames as the upload packet.

FILE LAYER 02

EVIDENCE SECTIONS

01

Current disability

Current diagnosis, clinical findings, testing, treatment history, medication, and functional impairment.

02

Qualifying basis

Service records, personnel records, exposure evidence, presumptive facts, or an established primary disability.

03

Link evidence

Continuity evidence, medical reasoning, or a nexus opinion that addresses the exact theory claimed.

04

Severity and impact

Symptoms, frequency, duration, flare-ups, measurements, work limits, and effects on ordinary activity.

FILE LAYER 03

STATEMENTS AND SUPPORTING FORMS

✓

Personal statement

A dated, signed account of onset, course, symptoms, treatment, and functional impact.

✓

Buddy or witness statements

Firsthand observations with identity, relationship, time period, and specific facts.

✓

Condition-specific forms

Use the current official VA form for TDIU, PTSD stressors, releases, dependents, or other special issues.

✓

Private records release

Submit the records directly when possible or provide a complete authorization for VA to request them.

FILE LAYER 04

QUALITY CONTROL BEFORE SUBMISSION

Readable

Pages face the right direction, scans are complete, and handwriting is legible.

Relevant

Each item supports a condition, theory, element, severity fact, or procedural request.

Indexed

Filenames and overview references match, dates are clear, and duplicates are removed.

Preserved

The veteran keeps the exact packet and proof showing when and how it was submitted.

DO NOT BURY THE POINT

A large file is not automatically a strong file. Relevance, completeness, and navigation determine whether the important evidence is easy to find.

