



BEFORE FILING
Steps 1 through 10

SUBMISSION
Steps 11 through 13

AFTER FILING
Track the VA workflow

READ FIRST

The roadmap is a sequence, not a promise that every claim needs every optional document. The correct theory and condition determine which evidence matters.

ROADMAP • STEPS 1 TO 7

PROTECT, IDENTIFY, AND BUILD

- 1

Protect the potential effective date

Consider an Intent to File before the full claim is ready.

Keep the ITF confirmation and expiration date.
- 2

Identify each condition

Use the diagnosis and the VA filing term when available.

Do not guess a diagnostic code or invent a diagnosis.
- 3

Choose the legal path

Direct, presumptive, secondary, aggravation, BDD, increase, or section 1151.

The path controls what must be proved.
- 4

Gather service and personnel records

Locate the event, duty, exposure, symptoms, or assignment relevant to the claim.

Use the correct records office and request route.
- 5

Document the current disability

Gather current treatment, diagnoses, imaging, testing, and medication history.

Use competent evidence suited to the condition.
- 6

Address the medical link

Obtain a reasoned opinion when the link is not legally presumed or already established.

Ask the exact direct, causation, or aggravation question.
- 7

Document severity and function

Capture frequency, duration, flare-ups, measurements, and effects on work and daily life.

Match the evidence to the current rating criteria.

ROADMAP • STEPS 8 TO 13

EXPLAIN, ORGANIZE, AND SUBMIT

- 8

Write the personal statement

Explain the timeline and observable impact in the veteran's own words.

Separate personal observation from medical conclusions.
- 9

Collect useful lay statements

Use witnesses with firsthand knowledge of the event, symptoms, or functional changes.

Specific observations are more useful than general praise.
- 10

Build the claim overview

Map every condition and legal theory to the supporting documents.

One page should show the structure of the whole file.
- 11

Complete the correct form

Use the current VA form and complete every applicable field, signature, and date.

Most covered disability claims use VA Form 21-526EZ.
- 12

Run the completeness check

Review filenames, duplicates, missing elements, releases, and pending records.

Use the Claim File Readiness Check as an orientation tool.
- 13

Submit and preserve proof

Attach evidence to the correct claim and retain a submission receipt.

Record the date, method, confirmation number, and files sent.

After submission: monitor requests, attend examinations, keep contact information current, and answer development letters by the stated deadline. The VA rater, not the examiner or representative, decides service connection and the percentage.

STAY IN SCOPE

C&P examination preparation and post-decision review strategy belong in their dedicated guides. This roadmap only shows where those later stages enter the process.

