One-Page Cheat Sheet

Before you paste

- Black out: SSN, file and claim numbers, date of birth, service number and DoD ID, your name, address, phone, email, other people's names, bank info. Check headers and footers.
- Ctrl+F the saved file for the first digits of your SSN.
- Training off, or a temporary chat. Never a login.

Every conversation

- New chat. Ground Rules first, as their own message. Then the prompt.
- Make it quote, with the page. Make it say "not found" instead of guessing.

Red flags in an answer

- A rating, a percentage, a "likely," or a dollar figure.
- A court case you didn't paste.
- "VA always" or "VA never."
- A deadline with no rule cited.
- A fact you never told it.
- It flips the moment you push back.
- It tells you what to file.

Before anything goes to VA

- Every quote found word for word in your document or on ecfr.gov.
- Every citation down to the paragraph.
- Every fact is yours and you can back it up.
- A VA-accredited representative has seen it.

Deadline card

- Higher-Level Review or Board appeal: generally within one year of the decision date.
- Supplemental Claim: any time, but within one year of the decision protects your effective date.
- Intent to file (new claims only): complete claim within one year.
- C&P exam: show up, or call before the date to reschedule.

The Redaction Checklist

Print this. Tape it next to your screen.

Before anything goes into an AI, remove:

- ☐ Social Security number (check headers, footers, every page)
- ☐ VA file number and claim number
- ☐ Date of birth
- ☐ Military service number, DoD ID / EDIPI
- ☐ Full name (use "the veteran" or "me")
- ☐ Home address, phone, email
- ☐ Other people's names (use "my spouse," "a shipmate," "Doctor A")
- ☐ Bank and direct deposit info

Then:

- ☐ Redacted PDF saved as a new, flattened copy (not just a box drawn on top)
- ☐ Searched the redacted file for the first digits of my SSN. Nothing found.
- ☐ Screenshots cropped
- ☐ Training turned off, or temporary chat on
- ☐ I did NOT give it any login. Not VA.gov, not ID.me, not Login.gov.

Every time it answers:

- ☐ Every quote found in my real document or on ecfr.gov
- ☐ No rating, odds or dollar figure taken seriously
- ☐ No fact in there I didn't give it
- ☐ Decisions about my specific claim saved for a VA-accredited representative

Practice Kit: Jordan's Paperwork

Practice on Jordan before you touch your own records. Everything below is made up, including the Social Security number (no real SSN starts with 000). These are the same pages the samples in this book came from, so you can check your answers against the chapters.

Drill 1, redaction (Chapter 3). Open the separate file *Practice_Letter_UNREDACTED.pdf*. Find and black out everything on the Chapter 3 list. There are five items, and one of them is easy to miss. Then paste the letter *without* redacting it into a chatbot with the Ground Rules on top, on purpose, and watch it stop. Delete that chat.

Drill 2, decode (Chapter 5). Run Prompt 1 on your redacted copy. Did it find the noise concession inside the tinnitus grant? Compare with the sample in Chapter 5.

Drill 3, sweep (Chapter 11). Run Extra E on the records pages for "knee," with "discharge" on the ignore list. Did it catch the problem-list entry on page 214, the "Denies locking" line on page 217, and the two dates on page 214? Did it skip page 218?

Drill 4, the exam (Chapter 8). Run Prompt 4 with the exam report, Jordan's notes, and the three record lines from Chapter 8. Find the two places where the report and the notes disagree.

Drill 1 answer: the CSS number on line four, the name (twice), the street address, the city line, and the bank line at the bottom. The facility names are worth removing too.

Practice Kit: Jordan's Records, Pages 212 to 219

Made up. For practice only.

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[Records chunk, pages 212–219 of a VA medical records download. Personal identifiers
removed.]

--- page 212 ---
SERVICE TREATMENT RECORD (scanned). Battalion Aid Station. 14 AUG 2012
S: SM reports L knee pain x2 days after hard landing during airborne operation. Pain 6/10
with weight bearing. Denies prior knee injury.
O: Mild effusion L knee. Tender medial joint line. ROM full with pain at end range.
A: L knee sprain.
P: Ibuprofen 800mg TID, ice, profile no running x14 days. RTC if not improved.

--- page 213 ---
SERVICE TREATMENT RECORD (scanned). Separation History and Physical. 2 MAR 2015
Have you ever had or have you now: Knee trouble (locking, giving out, pain)? [X] Yes
Examiner comment: Reports intermittent L knee pain since 2012, worse with running and
rucking. Not currently treated.

--- page 214 ---
VA PRIMARY CARE NOTE. Date of note: 01/03/2024. Signed: 01/05/2024.
Chief complaint: establish care.
Problem list: 1. Tinnitus. 2. Chronic left knee pain. 3. Snoring, daytime sleepiness.
HPI: Veteran reports L knee pain "since the Army," worse on stairs. Some days he skips
walking the dog because of it. Spouse reports loud snoring and witnessed pauses in
breathing.
Plan: Knee x-ray. Sleep medicine referral.

--- page 215 ---
RADIOLOGY REPORT. 01/10/2024. Left knee, 3 views. Impression: Mild medial joint space
narrowing. No acute fracture.

--- page 216 ---
VA SLEEP MEDICINE NOTE. 06/18/2024. Home sleep test: AHI 22 events/hour. Assessment:
Moderate obstructive sleep apnea. Plan: CPAP.

--- page 217 ---
VA PRIMARY CARE NOTE. Date of note: 07/22/2025.
Medications: meloxicam 15mg daily (knee). CPAP nightly.
HPI: Knee flares about twice a month, lasting 2–3 days; during a flare he cannot kneel or do
stairs without the rail and has called out of work twice this year. Denies locking.
Assessment: Chronic L knee pain, likely early degenerative changes.

--- page 218 ---
VA PRIMARY CARE NOTE. Date of note: 01/15/2026.
Knee: stable, no change. Discussed discharge planning from physical therapy; completed 8
sessions.

--- page 219 ---
MEDICATION LIST printed 01/15/2026: meloxicam 15mg daily; fluticasone nasal spray.
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Practice Kit: Jordan's Exam Report and Notes

Made up. For practice only.

Exam report, page 4:

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KNEE AND LOWER LEG CONDITIONS DISABILITY BENEFITS QUESTIONNAIRE (excerpt)
Contract examination, December 9, 2025. Examiner: [EXAMINER], PA-C.   Page 4 of 11

Evidence review
Was the Veteran's VA claims file (hard copy paper C-file and/or VBMS) reviewed?  [X] Yes  [
] No
If yes, list any records that were reviewed but were not included in the Veteran's VA claims
file:  None.
Were VA treatment records (CPRS) reviewed?  [ ] Yes  [X] No
Were private treatment records reviewed?  [ ] Yes  [X] No
Evidence comments: Reviewed STRs in VBMS.

Section I. Diagnosis: Left knee strain. Date of diagnosis: 2025.

Section II. Medical history: Veteran reports left knee pain beginning in service after a
hard parachute landing in 2012. Veteran states he self-treated and "did not go to sick call
every time." Currently reports pain with stairs and kneeling. Veteran denies flare-ups.

Section III. Flare-ups: Does the Veteran report flare-ups of the knee? [ ] Yes [X] No

Section IV. Range of motion: Flexion 0 to 105 degrees. Extension 105 to 0 degrees. Pain
noted on exam: flexion. Repetitive use testing: no additional loss of function.

Medical opinion: The claimed condition was less likely than not (less than 50 percent
probability) incurred in or caused by the claimed in-service injury, event or illness.
Rationale: There is no documentation of knee complaints in the service treatment records.
Without documentation of an in-service injury, a nexus cannot be established.
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Jordan's notes for his statement:

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my notes for my knee statement
- hurt it on a jump at bragg in 2012, came down hard on a ridge, knee swelled up
- went to the aid station once, they gave me motrin and a profile
- after that i just kept going, didnt want to be the guy on profile
- ruck marches were the worst, i would tape it
- my wife says i limp after a long day "like an old man"
- stairs at work, i take the elevator now, its embarrassing
- a couple times a month it flares and i cant kneel at all, maybe 2 or 3 days
- missed work twice this year because of it
- stopped playing ball with my son
- sleeping is bad when it flares, i wake up when i roll over
- buddy from my unit (sgt) saw me land, said "you went down hard"
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