

**INTRODUCTION TO PROCESSING RATING DECISIONS**  
**INSTRUCTOR LESSON PLAN**  
**TIME REQUIRED: 2 HOURS**

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## LESSON DESCRIPTION

The information below provides the instructor with an overview of the lesson and the materials that are required to effectively present this instruction.

**TMS #** 3903013

**PREREQUISITES** NONE

**TARGET AUDIENCE** The target audience for Processing Rating Decisions is VSR Entry Level.

Although this lesson is targeted to teach the VSR entry level employee, it may be taught to other VA personnel as mandatory or refresher type training.

**TIME REQUIRED** 2 hours

**MATERIALS/  
TRAINING AIDS** Lesson materials:

- Processing Ratings Decisions PowerPoint Presentation
- Processing Ratings Decisions Trainee Handouts
- Access to manuals & regulation

**TRAINING AREA/TOOLS** The following are required to ensure the trainees are able to meet the lesson objectives:

- Classroom or private area suitable for participatory discussions
- Seating, writing materials, and writing surfaces for trainee note taking and participation
- Handouts
- Large writing surface (easel pad, chalkboard, dry erase board, overhead projector, etc.) with appropriate writing materials
- Computer with PowerPoint software to present the lesson material

Trainees require access to the following tools:

- VA TMS to complete the assessment
- VBMS-A, VBMS
- VETSNET Awards, PCGL

## **PRE-PLANNING**

- Become familiar with all training materials by reading the Instructor Lesson Plan while simultaneously reviewing the corresponding PowerPoint slides. This will provide you the opportunity to see the connection between the Lesson Plan and the slides, which will allow for a more structured presentation during the training session.
- Become familiar with the content of the trainee handouts and their association to the Lesson Plan.
- Practice is the best guarantee of providing a quality presentation. At a minimum, do a complete walkthrough of the presentation to practice coordination between this Lesson Plan, the trainee handouts, and the PowerPoint slides and ensure your timing is on track with the length of the lesson.
- Ensure that there are copies of all handouts before the training session.
- When required, reserve the training room.
- Arrange for equipment such as flip charts, an overhead projector, and any other equipment (as needed).
- Talk to people in your office who are most familiar with this topic to collect experiences that you can include as examples in the lesson.
- This lesson plan belongs to you. Feel free to highlight headings, key phrases, or other information to help the instruction flow smoothly. Feel free to add any notes or information that you need in the margins.

## **TRAINING DAY**

- Arrive as early as possible to ensure access to the facility and computers.
- Become familiar with the location of restrooms and other facilities that the trainees will require.
- Test the computer and projector to ensure they are working properly.
- Before class begins, open the PowerPoint presentation to the first slide. This will help to ensure the presentation is functioning properly.
- Make sure that a whiteboard or flip chart and the associated markers are available.
- Provide a sign in sheet and at the conclusion of the session, ensure that all trainees sign in.

## INTRODUCTION TO PROCESSING RATINGS DECISIONS

### INSTRUCTOR INTRODUCTION

Complete the following:

- Introduce yourself
- Orient learners to the facilities
- Ensure that all learners have the required handouts

### TIME REQUIRED

2 hours

### PURPOSE OF LESSON

*Explain the following:*

This lesson is intended to help the VSR to define and identify Rating Decisions and accurately identify what type of action is needed to process the rating decision. This lesson will contain discussions and exercises that will allow you to gain a better understanding of:

- 20% or less Rating Decisions
- 30% or high Rating Decisions
- Differences between 0-20% and 30% and higher

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

*Discuss the following:*

*Slide 2*

*Handout pg2*

In order to accomplish the purpose of this lesson, the VSR will be required to accomplish the following lesson objectives.

The VSR will be able to:

- To define and identify Rating Decisions which result in a combined evaluation of 0% - 20%
- To define and identify Rating Decisions which result in a combined evaluation of 30% - 100%
- Identify the actions required to process a Rating Decision in either category

*Explain the following:*

Each learning objective is covered in the associated topic. At the conclusion of the lesson, the learning objectives will be reviewed.

### MOTIVATION

Explain to the trainees it is the responsibility of the VSR to process the RVSR's rating decision and notify the veteran of that information. It is vitally important the VSR understand what needs to be reviewed in the rating decision and how we notify the veteran of that information.

### STAR ERROR CODE(S)

TBD

## REFERENCES

*Slide 3*

*Handout pg. 3*

Explain where these references are located in the workplace.

- Rate Table
- M21-1 Part I, Appendix A - Rating Codes  
Appendix B – Rate Tables  
Appendix C – BDN Table and Codes
- M21-1MR III.v.2.A, *Decision Authorization*
- M21-1MR III.v.2.B, *Decision Notices*
- M21-1MR.III.v.2.B. 8, *Notification Requirements*
- VBMS Tip Sheets
- VBMS ADL SOP
- ADL VSR In and Out Cheat Sheet

## TOPIC 1: PROCESSING RATINGS DECISIONS

### INTRODUCTION

This topic will allow the trainee to understand processing rating decisions.

### TIME REQUIRED

1.75 hours

### OBJECTIVES/ TEACHING POINTS

Topic objectives:

- Explain what a rating decision grants means
- Explain entitlement
- Explain notification purposes

The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:

- Identify a rating decision and its components
- Identify the entitlement and notification purposes for the rating decision

### What decisions Look like

*Slide 4*

*Handout pg. 10*

### What decisions Look like

What does it Mean? - Explain to the trainee the following:

Explain the Narrative of the decision and the examples of the verbiage used when granting a condition.

Entitlement is granted – Any claimed disability that is granted service connection. Explain claim types to include: Original, Non-Original

Review the code sheet, and explain the listed contentions (historical and new) and the assigned percentage for each. Review the overall

*Slide 5,6*

combined percentage assigned. Important to note each code sheet will have the historical and most recent overall combined percentage for the Veteran.

*Handout pg. 12*

New condition, increase, secondary and/or reopen

Explain 20% or less could mean the following:

**Combined Evaluation of 0% - 20%**

*Slide 7*

*Handout pg. 4*

- The entitlement can be compensable 10-20% or
- The entitlement can be non-compensable at 0% or
- The entitlement can be 10% based on multiple 0% (38 CFR 3.324)

**NOTE:** 38 CFR 3.324 - Whenever a veteran is suffering from two or more separate permanent service-connected disabilities of such character as clearly to interfere with normal employability, even though none of the disabilities may be of compensable degree under the 1945 Schedule for Rating Disabilities the rating agency is authorized to apply a 10-percent rating, but not in combination with any other rating.

**Combined Evaluation of 0% - 20%**

*Slide 8*

*Handout pg. 5*

Review with the trainees it is important to note, once a rating on service connection is completed, Compensation Service has decided that a claim for dependency, submitted on a VA Form 21-526, VA Form 21-686c, and/or VA Form 21-674, requires a decision even when the Veteran is less than 30% service-connected. (ADL SOP)

**20% ≤ - What Decisions Look Like**

*Slide 5*

*Handout pg. 10*

Explain to the trainee what a decision looks like on the rating decision. Explain the decision can be for an original claim or a non-original claim to include a new condition, increase, secondary or reopened claim. Refer the student to the rating decision on page 10 of the training handout or show a rating decision that is completed in VBMS.

## **30% or Higher Ratings**

*Slides 9,10*

*Handout pgs. 6,7*

### What does it Mean?

Explain to the trainee the main difference between 0-20% or less and 30% and higher rating decision is dependency issues. If the veteran is rated at 30% or higher, explain the veteran dependents may be added to the veteran's award as long as all the pertinent dependency information is available. Also explain to the trainee, per the Compensation Service Bulletin of September 2013, when additional information from the claimant is required for dependency issues, the claims processors must attempt to obtain the information by telephone. This is the preferred method of communication for confirming dependency information.

Entitlement is granted – Any claimed disability that is granted service connection. Explain claim types to include: Original, Non-Original, new condition, increase, secondary and/or reopen.

Explain 30% or higher could mean the following:

- The entitlement can be compensable to 30% and higher or
- Can be Individual Unemployability or
- Can be Permanent and Total and entitled to Ancillary Benefits

## **Notification**

*Slide 11*

*Pg. 11*

For Notification Purposes explain to the trainee the following information is included in the notification letter either in ADL or PCGL. If ADL is not working, the notification letter must be completed in PCGL

- The decision made
- A summary of the evidence considered
- Reason for the decision
- Include payment information
- Any benefits being withheld and the reason for the withholding
- A notice of procedural due process and appellate rights of the claimant
- Include dependency information/denial if applicable
- Include additional benefits, if applicable

Explain to the trainee when using ADL letters, additional benefits are automatically added to the letter. If the VSR has to use a PCGL letter,

the additional benefits paragraphs will have to be added to the letter.

### **Something to Remember?**

*Slide 12*

*Handout pg. 7*

Explain to the trainee it is their job as a VSR to ensure the accuracy of the rating decision and notify the veteran of the decision made. It is not the job of the VSR to question the opinion/evaluation of the Rating Decision or the RVSR. Inform the trainee that it is perfectly acceptable to ask questions of the RVSR, in fact it is recommended, but impress upon the trainee that the job of the VSR is ensuring the rating decision covers what the veteran has claimed and notify the veteran of that decision

### **What you should do**

*Slides 13,14*

*Handout pg. 9*

Explain to the trainee what to look for when reviewing a rating decision. This is for all rating decisions regardless of overall percentage. These should include the following items:

- Effective Date - Ensure the rating decision has the correct effective date
- Payment Dates – Does the payment date reflect the correct date?
- Changes in Dates – Review the rating decision for multiple effective dates.
- Reasons for Decision – Ensure the rating decision explains the reason for the rating
- Rating decision condition matches VBMS-A/VETSNET data – Ensure all conditions have been rated and implemented into the system
- Consistency with the issues claimed (claim & 5103 Notice) – ensure proper development was completed
- Consistency with last Rating, if applicable – Review rating decision code sheet to ensure prior conditions are listed on new rating decision
- Dependency Information for 30% or higher – review all documents for dependency information
- Include additional benefits, if applicable – ensure all additional benefits have been included in the notification letter



**What you should do**

*Slide 15*

*Handout pg. 9*

- Check Decisions, Narrative, and Code sheet
- Check § 5103 Notice and any other development
- Look at the previous Rating vs. current Rating
- Look at the notification letter that followed
- Process award in VBMS-A (or VETSNET)
- Check for accuracy
- Print award with appropriate remarks
- Generate letter using ADL (or PCGL)
- Check for accuracy (***Proofread!***) - impress upon the VSR that this is one of the most important steps in processing a rating decision. They are responsible for their award and notification letters. They should always check their award and proofread their letter before submitting the award and letter for authorization.
- Print and organize letter
- Submit for Authorization/Review
- *Next case!*

**NOTE(S)**

Review with the trainees pages 5 and 7 of the trainee handout. This is a list of additional benefits and required forms needed for the notification letters. Reiterate if the notification letter is completed in ADL, the additional benefits are included in the notification letter. However, if the notification letter is completed in PCGL, the additional benefits paragraph and forms must be added to the letter.

On page 9 of the trainees handout is a POST D check list. This is provided as a guide for the trainee when reviewing ratings that are ready to process.

A sample rating decision is also provided in the trainee handout. Review the different parts of the rating decision and the code sheet with the trainees.

**DEMONSTRATION** Rating decisions can be reviewed in VBMS

**REVIEW EXERCISE**

*Handout pg. 13*

Have each student answer the following questions. Discuss them as a class

Ask if there are any questions about the information presented in the exercise, and then proceed to the Review.

## LESSON REVIEW, ASSESSMENT, AND WRAP-UP

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	The Processing Ratings Decisions lesson is complete.
<i>Discuss the following:</i>	Review each lesson objective and ask the trainees for any questions or comments.
<b>TIME REQUIRED</b>	.25 hours
<b>LESSON OBJECTIVES</b>	<p>You have completed the Processing Ratings Decisions lesson.</p> <p>The trainee should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to define and identify Rating decisions granting compensation</li><li>• Accurately identify what type of action is needed to process the rating decision</li></ul>
<b>ASSESSMENT</b>	<p>Remind the trainees to complete the on-line assessment in TMS to receive credit for completion of the course.</p> <p>The assessment will allow the participants to demonstrate their understanding of the information presented in this lesson.</p>