Introduction to Quality Reviews

Instructor Lesson Plan

Time Required: 1.5 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 # | 4194459 |
| Prerequisites | N/A |
| target audience | The target audience for **Introduction to Quality Reviews** is Challenge VSRs.  Although this lesson is targeted to teach Challenge VSRs, it may be taught to other VA personnel as mandatory or refresher type training. |
| Time Required | **1.5 hours** |
| Materials/ TRAINING AIDS | Lesson materials:   * **Introduction to Quality Reviews** PowerPoint Presentation * **Introduction to Quality Reviews** Trainee Handout * **Claim Attributes** Job Aid |
| 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, which include a practical exercise * 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 |
| 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. * The instructor completes a roll call attendance sheet or provides a sign-in sheet to the students. The attendance records are forwarded to the Regional Office Training Managers. |

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| Introduction | | |
| INSTRUCTOR INTRODUCTION | | Complete the following:   * Introduce yourself * Orient learners to the facilities * Ensure that all learners have the required handouts |
| time required | | **0.25 hours** |
| Purpose of Lesson | | This lesson is intended to provide an introduction to the Quality Review (QR) process. This lesson will also discuss the error trend categories utilized during the QR process. |
| Lesson Objectives  Slide 2  Handout 2 | In order to accomplish the purpose of this lesson, the VSR will be required to accomplish the following lesson objectives.  TheVSRwill be able to:   * Understand the Quality Review (QR) process * Utilize the QR checklists to prevent common errors * Understand the different QR error categories   Each learning objective is covered in the associated topic. At the conclusion of the lesson, the learning objectives will be reviewed. | |
| Motivation | Quality is one of four critical components of the VSR’s standard. Quality is the most important aspect of any VA employees job. If the VSR can achieve and maintain high quality, the rest of their job (e.g., production and workload management) will be much easier to maintain. By understanding the Quality Review process and how the QR team member reviews a claim, the VSR will be able to better avoid errors and identify their own errors and correct them before they can affect the Veteran. | |
| STAR Error code(s) | N/A | |
| References  Slide 3  Handout 3 | Explain where these references are located in the workplace.  All M21-1 references are found in the [Live Manual Website](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/).   * [M21-4 Chapter 3, National Quality Reviews](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000033436%2FChapter-3-National-Quality-Reviews) * [M21-4 Chapter 6, Quality Review Team (QRT)](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000037939%2FChapter-6-Quality-Review-Team-QRT) * [M21-4 Appendix B, End Product Codes and Work-Rate Standards for Quantitative Measurements](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000011474%2FAppendix-B-End-Product-Codes-and-Work-Rate-Standards-for-Quantitative-Measurements) * [Office of Field Operations Personnel Website](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/201/Personnel.htm) | |

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| Topic 1: The Quality Review (QR) Process | |
| Introduction | There are three types of Quality Reviews (STAR Reviews, IQRs, and IPRs). Knowing howing the process unfolds for each review well help the trainee avoid errors during claims processing. |
| Time Required | **0.50 hours** |
| OBJECTIVES/ Teaching Points | Topic Objectives:   * Understand the Quality Review (QR) process * Utilize the QR checklists to prevent common errors |
| National Quality Reviews (STAR)  Slide 4  Handout 4 | Every month, the National Quality Team (214) selects a sample of completed cases from each regional office and reviews these cases for quality. These cases are selected at random and comprise of both rating and non-rating EPs. Any errors found are not attributed to the individual who worked the claim but to the regional office. The individual who worked the claim or another individual may be asked to review any errors found for rebuttal or correction. The data gathered from these reviews allow the National Quality Team to identify national error trends. This data is also compiled with other data into a report card for each station. |
| **Individual Quality Reviews (IQRs)**  Slide 4-6  Handout 4 | Every month, your local Quality Review Team (QRT) pulls five cases for every employee at the regional office. These cases are randomly selected using ASPEN. They can be a mixture of all types of claims worked that month (rating or non-rating). The cases are reviewed for quality and any errors or comments are identified and a write-up is generated. Any errors identified are attributed to the individual who the claim was selected on. These errors will go against the VSRs quality standard. A GS-7 is required to maintain 80% or better quality, which then goes up to 85% at the GS-9 level. This quality percentage is calculated by averaging all quality reviews performed during the fiscal year.    If the claim is a rating EP, quality is determined on an issue basis. This means that any errors founds are attributed to an issue (like back condition). The quality percentage for each claim is calculated by dividing the number of issues by the number of correct issues. System compliance is considered an issue.  Example: There are 9 claimed issues. The total number of issues is 10 (9 claimed issues + systems compliance). The QRS finds an error dealing with 1 claimed issue and systems error. The number of correct issues is 8. The quality total for this claim is 80% (8 divided by 10).  If the claim is a non-rating EP, quality is determine on an claim basis. This means that an error found renders the whole claim incorrect. Non-rating EPs are either 100% or 0% correct.  New employees may be granted a grace period after returning from Challenge based on local policy. All employees are granted a grace period of thirty (30) days after any new manual guidance is released. |
| In-Process Reviews (IPRs)  Slide 7  Handout 5 | In-Process Reviews (IPRs) are non-punitive reviews performed by the Quality Review Team on all employees. These reviews allow for the QRT to:   * catch errors as early as possible * place an emphasis on getting the claim right * improve the employee’s understanding of why they made the error and how to prevent from making it in the future   Since IPRs are non-punitive, the VSR should always strive to remain as receptive as possible and utilize any IPR as a learning tool. The VSR is always welcome to meet with the QRT member to discuss the IPR. |
| QR Checklists  Slide 8  Handout 5  Review the two checklists with the trainees. They can be found in Attachment A and B of the Trainee Handout. | When performing a quality review, the National Quality Team utilizes the two checklists (one for rating EPs and another for non-rating EPs) found in Chapter 3 Appendices A and B. The local QRT team uses a similar checklist to perform IQRs. The main difference between the checklists used by the National Quality Team and the local QRTs is that the local QRTs check for systems compliance. The QR checklists used by the local QR teams can be found as attachments in the handout.  Both beginner and veteran VSRs can benefit from using the checklists while processing claims. Using these checklists can prevent the VSR from making any errors while processing claims. Many VSRs create their own checklists over time starting with the QR checklists as a foundation. Be sure to take some time during your training period to develop a checklist that works for you. Never think that using a checklist makes you less of a VSR. The best VSRs use some type of checklist. |
| Check for Comprehension | Ask the trainees the following questions and discuss the answers as a class.   1. **How many cases are selected each month for IQR?**   ***5***   1. **What quality percentage is required for a GS-7 VSR?**   ***80%***   1. **True/False. IPRs are punitive.**   ***False*** |
| Topic 2: Quality Review (QR) Error Categories | |
| Introduction | There are a number of error categories that both the National Quality Team and the local QRTs use when performing Quuality Reviews (QR). Again, an understanding of the different error categories will allow the VSR to prevent future QR errors. |
| Time Required | **0.50 hours** |
| OBJECTIVES/ Teaching Points | Topic objectives:   * Understand the different Quality Review error categories |
| **What is an Error?**  Slide 10  Handout 6 | The general guideline is that an error will be recorded when an action is taken that violates current regulations or established policies. Examples of outcome-related deficiencies include, but are not limited to, errors that result in an overpayment or underpayment to a claimant.  Procedural deficiencies are not recorded as errors. These deficiencies are recorded as comments. However, if the procedural deficiency is severe in nature, it will be recorded as an error. A judgment or a difference of opinion reflecting a possible better practice or solution is recorded as a comment rather than an error. If an error is identified with an issue not related to the end product under review, that error is also recorded as a comment. |
| Addressed Issues A1/A2  Slide 11  Handout 6 | **A1) Were all claimed issues addressed?**  A “claimed issue” is any benefit specifically mentioned by the applicant or his/her representative or any benefit that is reasonably raised by the evidence of record. Since a claim may be received through any means of communication, each document in the file must be checked to ensure that all issues have been addressed.  **A2) Were all inferred issues addressed?**  An “inferred issue” is not defined by regulation. An “inferred issue” is often derived from the consideration or outcome of a “claimed issue.” The Veterans Court has stated that “An issue may not be ignored or rejected merely because the Veteran did not expressly raise the appropriate legal provision for the benefit sought.” |
| Development B1/B2  Slide 12  Handout 6-7  Inform the trainees that B2 errors are one of the largest errors trends in the nation. | B1) Was VCAA pre-decision "notice" provided and adequate?  38 CFR 3.159 states that upon receipt of a substantially complete application, VA is required to notify the claimant and the claimant's representative, if any, of any information, and any medical or lay evidence, not previously provided that is necessary to substantiate the claim. As part of that notice, VA is required to indicate which portion of that information and evidence, if any, is to be provided by the claimant and which portion, if any, VA will attempt to obtain on behalf of the claimant.  B2) Does the record show VCAA compliant development to obtain all indicated evidence prior to deciding the claim?  [38 CFR 3.159(c)(2)](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ffd6e196d08360137bcf42cc946d8dd9&mc=true&node=se38.1.3_1159&rgn=div8) states, in part, that VA must make reasonable efforts to help a claimant in obtaining the evidence necessary to substantiate a claim. Therefore, all indicated and necessary development must be completed before deciding a claim unless a grant is warranted based on the evidence of record.  If a VA examination report was the basis for a rating decision, was that report adequate and sufficient for rating purposes? Was there already sufficient medical evidence of record to rate the claim? (See [38 CFR 3.326(b) & (c)](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ffd6e196d08360137bcf42cc946d8dd9&mc=true&node=se38.1.3_1326&rgn=div8)). While requesting an examination is generally a judgment area with considerable latitude, that judgment must be exercised within a reasonable range. The record must contain evidence that fully supports the disability determination and not lack any evidence that would prompt a remand from the Board of Veterans Appeals. Requests for medical opinions on legal issues such as “is a condition service-connected” constitute error. |
| Rating Decision C1/C2  Slide 13  Handout 7  Do not spend too much time on this section. This is meant to be just a quick informational tidbit. | Although C1 and C2 errors are attrributed to the RVSR, if the VSR is aware of what constitutes a C1 and C2 error then they may be able to catch an error before it leaves the building.  **C1) Was the grant or denial of all issues correct?**  Does the evidence of record support the decision according to applicable law regulation and policy?  Any error called in this element must be the equivalent of a clear and unmistakable error. An error includes failure to allow benefits based upon application of the doctrine of reasonable doubt when a case is in equipoise ([38 CFR 3.102](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ffd6e196d08360137bcf42cc946d8dd9&mc=true&node=se38.1.3_1102&rgn=div8)). A judgment variance such as “difference of opinion” or “better rating practice” will not be considered an error or noted in a comment as QA does not make best practice suggestions at this time.  Deficiencies invisible to the claimant such as award reason codes or entitlement codes should not be called. Such deficiencies should be noted in the Remarks section of the form.  **C2) Was the percentage evaluation assigned correct (including combined eval.)?**  Generally, an error in this category may only be called when supported by evaluation tools, such as the Evaluation Builder. If the Evaluation Builder was not used by the decision maker, then an error may still be called if the evaluation is not supported by the evaluation tool or is not in compliance with the Rating Schedule. The only possible judgment variance is when the evidence of symptomatology is divided between two evaluation criteria and the disability picture is not clear enough to conclusively apply [38 CFR 4.7](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=2f3c86cf5527e2c9d10d610a650dee32&mc=true&node=se38.1.4_17&rgn=div8). |
| Award Dates D1(R)/D2(R)/H(NR)  Slide 14  Handout 7-8  Inform the trainees that this error category is one of the largest errors trends in the nation. | **D1) Are all effective dates affecting payment correct?**  A clear error in this element results in an overpayment or underpayment of benefits.  Does the generated award follow the basic rules contained in 38 CFR 3.31, 3.114, 3.400-404, & 3.500-504.  **D2) Were payment rates correct?**  If applicable to the case being reviewed, issues such as dependency, income, withholdings and recoupments, hospitalization, etc., must be considered when deciding whether the payment rates are correct.  **H) Are all payment dates and rates correct?**  This is a combination of both the D1 and D2 questions from the rating checklist. |
| Dependency D1-5(NR)  Slide 15  Handout 8 | **D1) Was a dependent spouse correctly established or removed? (38 CFR 3.50)**  38 CFR 3.50 is the basic rule. Further definitions and development requirements are contained in 38 CFR 3.50 through 3.60 and 3.200 through 3.216. The scope of this and other dependency questions includes preparation of a justifiable Administrative Decision when required.  **D2) Were dependent children correctly established or removed? (38 CFR 3.57 and 3.667)**  The issues of date of birth, relationship, and, in some cases, custody must be properly resolved. Development for school attendance may be required.  **D3) Were dependent parents correctly established or removed? (38 CFR 3.59)**  38 CFR 3.59 is the basic rule. Relationship and dependency must be properly established.  **D4) Was a surviving spouse correctly established or removed? (38 CFR 3.50(b))**  38 CFR 3.50(b) is the basic rule.  **D5) Were surviving children correctly established or removed? (38 CFR 3.57)**  38 CFR 3.57 is the basic rule. |
| Notification Letter  F1-4/K1-4(NR)  Slide 16  Handout 8 | **F1/K1) Was notification sent?**  This question is self-explanatory. If the letter was not sent to the correct claimant and correct address, the letter was not sent.  **F2/K2) Was the notification correct?**  It is essential that correspondence to claimants be viewed, to the extent possible, from the claimant’s perspective.  Notification must:   * be factually correct, * address all issues, * be as direct and concise as possible, * be logically laid out so thought sequences are not broken, and * be free from apparent contradictory statements.   **F3/K3) Were appeal rights included?**  Notice of procedural and appellate rights is required following every decision. This may be furnished by attachment of VA Form 4107 or equivalent language in the body of the notification.  **F4/K4) Was the Power of Attorney indicated, correct, and notification properly documented?**  The master record should be updated to include designation of the claimant’s representative so that computer-generated notices are furnished to both. |
| System Compliance S1  Slide 17-18  Handout 9  *Inform the trainees that this error category is one of the largest errors trends in the nation.* | **S1) Were all systems appropriately updated to reflect current status of claim?**  When performing a quality review the QRT member asks nine questions. The questions are all self-explanatory. Systems errors may not cause an overpayment or underpayment but they are still considered a critical error.  These are the nine systems-related questions:   * Is the date of claim and end product correct? * Are all the payees' addresses (including direct deposit information) correct? * Are all periods of service for the Veteran verified and updated in all systems? * Was the Power of Attorney (POA) information/access updated in all systems and correspondence? * Were special issues and flashes entered and correct? * Were contentions and classifications entered correctly? * Were tracked items entered and updated as necessary? * Was the claim status (Ready for Decision (RFD), Rating Decision Complete (RDC), OPEN) updated appropriately? * Were the suspense dates (tracked item or claim level) updated and correct?   ***Use the Claim Attributes Job Aid if you have questions about when to use flashes and claim labels.*** |
| Check for Comprehension | Ask the trainees the following questions and discuss the answers as a class.   1. **What are the three most common error categories nation wide?**   ***B2, effective/payment dates (D1/D2/H), and systems compliance***   1. **True or False. An error can be called based on an opinion or personal preference.**   ***False***   1. **Identify the Error. The VSR does not send a 5103 letter when it is required.**   ***B1***   1. **Identify the Error. The VSR adds the child without the proper information.**   ***D2***   1. **Identify the Error. The VSR does not include notification on all the claimed issues.**   ***F2 or K2*** |

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| Lesson Review, Assessment, and Wrap-up | |
| Introduction | The Introduction to Quality Reviews lesson is complete.  Review each lesson objective and ask the trainees for any questions or comments. |
| Time Required | **0.25 hours** |
| Lesson Objectives | You have completed the Introduction to Quality Reviews lesson.  The trainee should be able to:   * Understand the Quality Review (QR) process * Utilize the QR checklists to prevent common errors * Understand the different QR error categories |
| Assessment | Remind the trainees to complete the on-line assessment in TMS to receive credit for completion of the course.  The assessment will allow the participants to demonstrate their understanding of the information presented in this lesson. |