

**READY TO RATE CLAIMS**  
**INSTRUCTOR LESSON PLAN**  
**TIME REQUIRED: 4.5 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 #** 766921

**PREREQUISITES** Prior to this lesson, Rating Veteran Service Representatives (RVSRs) should have 0-6 months of VSR experience. Trainees should also have completed both Phase I and Phase II of rating training before proceeding with this lesson.

**TARGET AUDIENCE** The target audience for Ready to Rate Claims is the Rating Veterans Service Representative (RVSR).

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

**TIME REQUIRED** 4.5 hours

**MATERIALS/  
TRAINING AIDS** Lesson materials:

- Ready to Rate Claims PowerPoint Presentation
- Ready to Rate Claims Trainee Handout Packet
- Ready to Rate Claims Answer Key

**NOTE(S)** For Practice Exercise at the end of the lesson, the instructors should locate 10 live cases, covering a variety of claim types, for the trainees to review and determine if the cases are ready to rate. Ensure that the majority of the cases are ready to rate, but have some in the mix that are clearly not ready to rate and need some additional development action. The recommended mix is 6 ready to rate and 4 that are not.

**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 tool:

- 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.
- Provide a sign-in sheet, and at the conclusion of the session, ensure that all trainees sign in.

## INTRODUCTION TO READY TO RATE CLAIMS

### **INSTRUCTOR INTRODUCTION**

Complete the following:

- Introduce yourself
- Orient trainees to the facilities
- Ensure that all trainees have the required handouts
- Explain the relationship between the prerequisites and lesson objectives

### **TIME REQUIRED**

.25 hours

### **NOTE(S)**

The instructor should become familiar with 38CFR Part 4 and the Medical EPSS tool prior to teaching this lesson. Demonstrations and discussions regarding 38CFR Part 4 information and use of Medical EPSS tool to obtain listings of diagnostic codes and conditions are included in this lesson.

### **PURPOSE OF LESSON**

*Explain the following:*

This lesson is intended to provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the VSR and RVSR when reviewing and determining if cases forwarded for decisions are ready to rate. This lesson will contain discussions and exercises that will allow you to gain a better understanding of:

- VA Adjudicative Decisions Requiring a Rating Decision
- Responsibilities of a VSR
- Responsibilities of an RVSR
- Rating Decision Resources

**LESSON  
OBJECTIVES**

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

*Discuss the following:*

The VSR and RVSR will be able to:

*Slides 2-3*

*Handout 2*

- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify VSR and RVSR rating activity jurisdiction, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify issues that require a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify issues that require a deferred rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify the responsibilities of a VSR when making an entitlement decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify VSR authority to make an entitlement decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify the responsibilities of an RVSR when making a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify RVSR authority to make a decision on claims requiring a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet, identify available resources when making a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.

*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**

This lesson is designed to provide information on the the responsibilities of the VSR and RVSR to ensure that all of the development actions have been completed properly when a case is deemed ready to rate and that all of the necessary elements to render a decision have been met.

If cases are deemed ready to rate incorrectly, this could result in delayed processing of claims, increased cost to VA due to having to rework the claim or possible legal issues.

## **STAR ERROR CODE(S)**

The Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) Program reviews cases and considers them either “accurate” or “in error” for the purpose of measuring technical accuracy. The following are examples of errors called during the 2010 STAR review.

Please discuss common errors related to Ready to Rate Claims with the trainees.

## **REFERENCES**

Explain where these references are located in the workplace.

*Slide 4*

*Handout 3*

- 38 CFR Part 4
- M21-1, Part I, Appendices A, B & C
- M21-1MR III.ii.1.A
- M21-1MR.III.ii.1.A.3
- M21-1MR III.ii.6
- M21-1MR III.ii.7
- M21-1MR.III.iii.7.2.b
- M21-1MR III.iv.1.1.f
- M21-1MR III.iv.2.A
- M21-1MR III.iv.5
- M21-1MR III.iv.6.A
- M21-1MR.III.v.2.A.3.b

# TOPIC 1: VA ADJUDICATIVE DECISIONS REQUIRING A RATING DECISION

**INTRODUCTION** This topic will provide the trainee with basic information required to identify cases that require a rating decision and when a deferral of the rating decision is required.

**TIME REQUIRED** .5 hours

**OBJECTIVES/  
TEACHING POINTS**

*Discuss the following:*

Topic objectives:

- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify VSR and RVSR rating activity jurisdiction, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify issues that require a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify issues that require a deferred rating decision, with 85% accuracy.

The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:

- Decisions for Rating Activities
- Issues Requiring a Rating decision
- Issues Requiring a Deferred Rating Decision

**Decisions for Rating Activities**

*Slides 5*

*Handout 4*

Decisions for rating activities are performed as follows:

- Veteran Service Representative (VSR) - Entitlement decisions
- Rating Veteran Service Representative (RVSR) - Rating decisions

**DISCUSSION**

Discuss with the trainees, the implications of :

The court found that VA's policy of re-adjudication was too "narrow" and "inconsistent with both the spirit and intent" of the court's decision. *Nehmer*, 32 F. Supp. 2d 1175 at 1180 (1999).

Status of Rulemaking – at OMB as of early March 2010

Proper Jurisdiction

Rating agencies of original jurisdiction are vested with the authority to make decisions and to take other actions on claims that require a rating decision.

*Slides 6*

Veteran Service Representatives (VSRs) have the responsibility to review cases to determine whether there is:

- A proper claim and
- An issue within the jurisdiction of the rating activity

Considerations of Jurisdiction

Considerations of jurisdiction include:

- Existence of proper service and statutory or regulatory bars
- Sufficiency of evidence necessary for resolution of all issues, including inferred ones

**Issues Requiring a Rating Decision**

Rating decisions are required on major issues that relate to entitlement, such as:

*Discuss the following:*

- Service-connected (SC) for diseases and injuries
- Evaluation of disability, including Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)
- Cause of death and relationship of SC diseases or injury
- Competency or incompetency of payee beneficiaries
- Determination whether the Veteran was insane at the time of:
  - Commission of offenses that resulted in a service department determination precluding entitlement to benefits
  - Causing or participating in a homicide
  - Committing suicide
- Permanent incapacity of a child for self-support (over age 18)
- Incurrence of additional disability or death due to hospitalization, medical or surgical treatment, vocational rehabilitation or examination (38 USC 1151)
- If required by the need for retroactive determination for a period prior to July 1, 1973, whether or not a disability incurred or aggravated in peacetime was a direct result of:
  - Armed conflict
  - Extra hazardous service
- If service was less than 90 days, a determination at the time of discharge, the Veteran had a SC disability that would have justified discharge for the same disability
- Permanent and total disability claims for pension
- Entitlement to allowance for Aid and Attendance (A&A) or housebound benefits for:
  - Veteran receiving non service-connected disability pension
  - Spouse of a Veteran receiving disability compensation
  - Surviving spouse receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
  - Parent receiving DIC
  - Surviving spouse receiving Improved Death Pension
  - Surviving spouse receiving Death Compensation
- Entitlement to:
  - Automobile Allowance or Adaptive Equipment
  - Special Adaptive Housing/Special Home Adaptation Grant
  - Civil Service Preference when the Veteran does not have any compensable service-connected disability(ies)

*Handout 4-5*

**Issues Requiring a Deferred Rating Decision**

*Slide 7*

*Handout 5-6*

**NOTE(S)**

Compensable Evaluations While Deferring Other Issues

Actions to Take on Cases Deferred for Further Development

Development

Make a partial rating decision if the record contains sufficient evidence to grant any benefit at issue. Defer a rating decision when:

- The rating activity receives a claim that is underdeveloped or incomplete and requires additional development
- There is an issue of service-connection in a death case while granting Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits under some other provision of the law, such as 38 U.S.C. 1318

Inform trainees that it is proper to prepare a rating decision granting service-connection for the case of discharge due to disability in a case where there is less than 90 days of service, if Death Pension entitlement is otherwise shown.

Grant a compensable evaluation for disabilities, if possible, even though the issue of service-connection for other disabilities or entitlement to a higher evaluation must be deferred.

Grant an increased evaluation immediately, even though a rating under paragraph 28, 29, or 30 of the rating schedule may require deferral for proper certification.

In addition to granting evaluations:

- Identify the deferred issues both in the conclusion and in the narrative of the decision
- Provide a brief description of the reason for the deferral in the narrative

If the rating activity returns a case for further development with regard to the issue of service-connection for cause of death:

- Request the indicated evidence
- Award pension benefits if entitlement is established and an award was not made prior to submission of the case to the rating board
- Establish a 30-day control for submission of the requested evidence

If the requested evidence is:

- Received, resubmit the case to the rating board for a formal decision
- Not received within 30 days, and no additional time is requested, resubmit the case to the rating board for a decision based on the evidence of record

**NOTE(S)**

Explain to trainees that if a reopened claim with new evidence is received, route the previously denied case to the rating activity.

Trainees should not use a partial rating to:

- Deny one claim when resolution of another issue is pending examination or receipt of other evidence
- Assign a noncompensable evaluation if only compensation is at issue
- Deny service-connection for cause of death if development is being undertaken for another condition that is possibly involved

**DISCUSSION**

Discuss with the trainees the local requirements about sending claims back to the Pre-team when additional development is required.

*Check comprehension:* Ask the trainees the following questions:

1. What decisions are made for rating activities by the VSR and RVSR?

**Response:** Entitlement decisions are made by the VSR and rating decisions are made by the RVSR.

2. What issues require a rating decision?

**Response:**

- Service-connected (SC) for diseases and injuries
- Evaluation of disability, including Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)
- Cause of death and relationship of SC diseases or injury
- Competency or incompetency of payee beneficiaries
- Determination whether the Veteran was insane at the time of a commission of a crime, homicide, or suicide
- Permanent incapacity of a child for self-support (over age 18)
- Incurrence of additional disability or death due to hospitalization, medical or surgical treatment, vocational rehabilitation or examination (38 USC 1151)
- If required by the need for retroactive determination for a period prior to July 1, 1973, whether or not a disability incurred or aggravated in peacetime was a direct result of armed conflict or extra hazardous service
- If service was less than 90 days, a determination at the time of discharge, the Veteran had a SC disability that would have justified discharge for the same disability
- Permanent and total disability claims for pension
- Entitlement to allowance for Aid and Attendance or housebound benefits for a Veteran receiving non service-connected disability pension; spouse of a Veteran receiving disability compensation; surviving spouse receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC); parent receiving DIC; surviving spouse receiving Improved Death Pension; and surviving spouse receiving Death Compensation
- Entitlement to Automobile Allowance or Adaptive Equipment, Special Adaptive Housing/Special Home Adaptation Grant, and Civil Service Preference

3. When is it acceptable to make a partial rating decision on some issues and defer the rating decision on others?

**Response:** Make a partial rating decision if the record contains sufficient evidence to grant any benefit at issue.

4. What issues require deferral of a rating decision?

**Response:**

- The rating activity receives a claim that is underdeveloped or incomplete and requires additional development
- Considering the issue of service-connection in a death case while granting Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits under some other provision of the law, such as 38 U.S.C. 1318

## TOPIC 2: VSR RESPONSIBILITIES

### INTRODUCTION

This topic will allow the trainee to gain a better understanding of the responsibilities of a VSR in making entitlement decisions and the limits to his/her authority.

### TIME REQUIRED

.5 hours

### OBJECTIVES/ TEACHING POINTS

*Discuss the following:*

Topic objectives:

- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify the responsibilities of a VSR when making an entitlement decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify VSR authority to make an entitlement decision, with 85% accuracy.

The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:

- VSR Responsibilities
- VSR Entitlement Decision Authority
- VSR Authority Limitations

### VSR Responsibilities

The VSR has the responsibility to review cases to determine whether there is a proper claim and an issue with the jurisdiction of the rating activity.

*Slide 8*

Upon receipt of a claim, it is the responsibility of the VSR to:

*Handout 7*

- Ensure the claim is valid
- Verify that basic eligibility exists
- Process all submitted documents properly
- Update the records using:
  - Share corporate database
  - Modern Awards Processing – Development (MAP-D)
  - Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS)
  - Veterans Appeals Control and Locator System (VACOLS)

### Duties

VSR duties include determining and ensuring:

- All issues are addressed in the Veterans Claims Assistance Act (VCAA) letter
- All development actions have been completed
- Service Treatment Records (STRs) are ordered and received
- Necessary examinations are scheduled and obtained
- Necessary medical opinion(s) are obtained
- All Federal records are obtained

**VSR Entitlement  
Decision Authority**

*Handout 7*

The VSR has the authority to make entitlement decisions and, when supported by evidence, deny benefits if the issue involves:

- A basic eligibility determination
- An adjustment in income
- A change in the number of dependents
- Aid and Attendance (A&A) due to nursing home patient under 38 CFR 3.351(c)(2), where the patient is in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity

A VSR may deny a claim for SC disability or death benefits without a rating decision if:

- There is a legal bar to entitlement
- The claimant does not respond within 60 days to a request for evidence needed to determine whether or not there is a legal bar to payment, such as in cases involving continuous cohabitation

**VSR Authority  
Limitations**

*Handout 8*

VSRs do not have the authority to perform the following without a rating decision:

- Determine if service medical records support a disability claim
- Deny a specific claim for service-connected death benefits

**NOTE(S)**

Inform trainees that in death cases, the claim is one in which:

- Service-connection was not specifically claimed
- There is no reasonable probability that the cause or contributory cause of death was related to service

**Development**

If basic eligibility is established and the claim involves consideration of any medical evidence, refer it to the rating activity for review. A denial requires a formal coded rating decision.

*Comprehension check:* Ask the trainees the following questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of the VSR?

**Response:** To review cases to determine whether there is a proper claim and an issue within the jurisdiction of the rating activity.

Upon receipt of a claim, it is the responsibility of the VSR to:

- Ensure the claim is valid
- Verify that basic eligibility exists
- Process all submitted documents properly
- Update the records using:
  - Share corporate database
  - Modern Awards Processing – Development (MAP-D)
  - Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS)
  - Veterans Appeals Control and Locator System (VACOLS)

2. When does the VSR have authority to make entitlement decisions?

**Response:** when supported by evidence, deny benefits if the issue involves:

- A basic eligibility determination
- An adjustment in income
- A change in the number of dependents
- Aid and Attendance (A&A) due to nursing home patient status under 38 CFR 3.351(c)(2), where the patient is in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity

A VSR may deny a claim for SC disability or death benefits without a rating decision if:

- There is a legal bar to entitlement
- The claimant does not respond within 60 days to a request for evidence needed to determine whether or not there is a legal bar to payment, such as in cases involving continuous cohabitation

3. What does the VSR not have the authority to do without a rating decision?

**Response:**

- Determine if service medical records support a disability claim
- Deny a specific claim for service-connected death benefits without a rating decision

**EXERCISE**

*Handout (Attachment  
A)*

Allow the trainees 10 minutes to complete the exercise located in Attachment A of the trainee handout packet.

Discuss the correct responses and the responses produced by the trainees.

Ensure that the trainees understand the information presented.

## TOPIC 3: RVSR RESPONSIBILITIES

**INTRODUCTION** This topic will allow the trainee to gain a better understanding of the responsibilities of an RVSR when making rating decisions and the limits to his/her authority.

**TIME REQUIRED** .5 hours

**OBJECTIVES/  
TEACHING POINTS**

*Discuss the following:*

Topic objectives:

- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify the responsibilities of an RVSR when making a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify RVSR authority to make a decision on claims requiring a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.

The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:

- RVSR Responsibilities
- RVSR Entitlement Decision Authority
- RVSR Authority Limitations
- Provisions Applied to the Rating Decision

**RVSR Responsibilities** The RVSR is vested with the authority to make decisions and take other actions on claims requiring a rating decision.

*Slide 9*

The RVSR is responsible for ensuring that:

- Adequate initial notice has been rendered the claimant under the Veterans Claims Assistance Act
- The medical record is adequate for rating
- All reasonable efforts have been made to obtain pertinent Government and non-Government evidence
- Adequate time has been given for responses to inquiries and requests

*Handout 9-10*

The RVSR is responsible for reviewing the evidence, including:

- Recognizing the need for evidence in relation to a claim
- Determining the:
  - Admissibility of the evidence
  - Weight to be afforded evidence that is presented
  - Need for additional evidence
  - Need for a physical examination

Review Evidence for Rating Decision

Prior to making a decision, the RVSR reviews all the evidence of record to ensure completeness and adequacy of the evidentiary record, including:

- Service treatment records
- Military personnel records, if required
- VA treatment records
- Private treatment records
- Examinations
- Any other evidence identified by the claimant

The RVSR may request additional information in order to reach a fair and equitable decision, including:

- Examinations
- Medical opinions
- Medical or lay evidence

If additional evidence is required, the RVSR will prepare a deferred rating decision directing specific development action to complete the claim.

Provisions Applied to the Rating Decision

When making decisions or taking action on claims that require a rating decision, the RVSR must apply the provisions of all pertinent:

- Laws and regulations
- Schedules for rating disabilities
- Policy statements
- Procedures
- Administrators' and Secretaries' decisions
- Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) precedents
- Legal precedents governing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

**NOTE(S)**

Be prepared for questions from trainees regarding Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) precedents.

**RVSR Entitlement Decision Authority**

The RVSR has the authority to make entitlement decisions and, when supported by evidence, deny benefits if the issue involves:

*Handout 10*

- Disability evaluations
- Special Monthly Pension (SMP)
  - Aid and Attendance under [38 CFR 3.351\(b\)](#)
  - Housebound under [38 CFR 3.351\(d\)](#)
- Individual unemployability
- Hospitalization and surgical treatment
- Adequacy of examination and hospital reports

**RVSR Authority  
Limitations**

*Slide 10*

*Handout 10*

The RVSR may not deny a claim or make a rating decision:

- Before all efforts to obtain evidence have been exhausted
- Unless adequate efforts have been made to obtain all identified evidence, and that adequate time for response has been given
- Before the expiration of the notice period (e.g.. Duty to Assist/VCAA)

*Check Comprehension:* Ask the trainees the following questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of the RVSR?

**Response:** To make decisions and take other actions on claims requiring a rating decision.

Ensure that:

- Adequate initial notice has been rendered the claimant under the Veterans Claims Assistance Act
- The medical record is adequate for rating
- All reasonable efforts have been made to obtain pertinent Government and non-Government evidence
- Adequate time has been given for responses to inquiries and requests

Review the evidence, including:

- Recognizing the need for evidence in relation to a claim
- Determining the:
  - Admissibility of the evidence
  - Weight to be afforded evidence that is presented
  - Need for additional evidence
  - Need for a physical examination

2. What additional information may the RVSR request in order to ensure the claim is ready to rate?

**Response:**

- Examinations
- Medical opinions
- Medical or lay evidence

3. When does the RVSR have authority to make entitlement decisions requiring a rating decision?

**Response:** When supported by evidence, deny benefits if the issue involves:

- Disability evaluations
  - Special Monthly Pension (SMP)
    - Aid and Attendance under 38 CFR 3.351(b)
    - Housebound under 38 CFR 3.351(d)
  - Individual unemployability
  - Hospitalization and surgical treatment
  - Adequacy of examination and hospital reports
4. When does the RVSR not have the authority to deny a claim or make rating decisions?

**Response:**

- Before all efforts to obtain evidence have been exhausted
- Unless adequate efforts have been made to obtain all identified evidence, and that adequate time for response has been given
- Before the expiration of the notice period (e.g., Duty to Assist/VCAA)

**EXERCISE**

*Handout (Attachment B)*

Allow the trainees 15 minutes to complete the exercise located in Attachment B of the trainee handout packet.

Discuss the correct responses and the responses produced by the trainees.

Ensure that the trainees understand the information presented.

## TOPIC 4: RATING DECISION RESOURCES

**INTRODUCTION** This topic will allow the trainee to gain a better understanding of the resources used in making rating decisions.

**TIME REQUIRED** .25 hours

**OBJECTIVES/  
TEACHING POINTS** Topic objective:

*Discuss the following:*

- Using the trainee handout packet, identify available resources when making a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.

The following topic teaching points support the topic objective:

- Resources for Rating Decision
- Rating Schedule
- Medical Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)

**Resources for Rating Decision** Two resources are available to assist when making a rating decision:

- Rating Schedule
  - Medical Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)
- Slide 11*

*Handout 11*

**Rating Schedule** Parts 3 and 4 of Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) are used to make eligibility determinations and assign percentage evaluations.

*Explain the following:*

*Handout 11*

*Handout (Attachment C)*

38 CFR Part 4, used most often in rating decisions, is titled the Schedule for Rating Disabilities (commonly referred to as the Rating Schedule). The rating schedule is primarily a guide in the evaluation of disability resulting from all types of diseases and injuries encountered as a result of, or incident to, military service.

The rating schedule is divided into 15 body systems, with each system assigned a series of diagnostic codes (e.g., 5000 series being musculoskeletal, 5200 bones and joints) or analogous codes.

For some disabilities, the evaluation assigned is dependent on measurable criteria such as degree of flexion/extension; while other disabilities may not have such specifics to determine the evaluation, and may depend on judgmental criteria (i.e., “mild, moderate, and severe”).

- Diagnostic Codes** The 4 digit numbers on the left of the rating schedule represent diagnostic codes for ratable disabilities. These numbers extend from 5000 to a possible 9999.
- Analogous Codes** When an unlisted disease, injury, or residual condition is encountered, which requires a rating by analogy, the diagnostic code will be entered as an Analogous Code.
- The first 2 digits will be selected from that part of the schedule most closely identifying the part or system of the body involved; the last 2 digits will be “99” for all unlisted conditions.
  - Sometimes a condition will be coded with two diagnostic codes, separated by a hyphen. For example: “5002-5289”. This represents a particular disease, rated on the basis of the residual condition. In Veterans Network (VETSNET), the rating data will be pulled through automatically and no data entry will be required.

The text represented in the rating schedule may not exactly match the citation of disabilities on the rating decision coding page. This is because the diagnostic terminology on the rating decision coded conclusion page represents diagnostic terminology provided by the medical examiner.

**DEMONSTRATION** Have the trainees go to [VA Reference website](#) and select 38CFR, Part 4. Demonstrate and discuss the various areas of information such as the different appendices, or the index of references to disabilities and how, as a VSR, they may want to use them.

**NOTE(S)** Suggest to the trainees that they save the reference to their “Desktop” so they can have easy accessibility for future use.

**Medical Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)** The Medical EPSS tool may assist in clarification of claimed disabilities when promulgating a rating decision. The system provides general information on the following:

*Handout 12*

- Body systems and how they function
- Medical terminology
- Medical abbreviations
- Medical conditions

**DEMONSTRATION** Have the trainees go to the Medical Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS) at <http://epss.vba.va.gov/mepss/> and demonstrate via the Analogous button where they can obtain listings of diagnostic codes and conditions.

*Check Comprehension:* Ask the trainees the following questions:

1. What resources are available to assist in making a rating decision?

**Response:**

- 38 CFR, Part 4 - Rating Schedule
- Medical Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)

2. What resource is primarily a guide in the evaluation of disability resulting from all types of diseases and injuries encountered as a result of, or incident to, military service?

**Response:** 38 CFR, Part 4 – Schedule for Rating Disabilities

3. What information is provided in the Medical Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)?

**Response:**

- Body systems and how they function
- Medical terminology
- Medical abbreviations
- Medical conditions

**REGIONAL OFFICE  
SPECIFIC TOPICS** At this time, add any information pertaining to guides for returning cases that are not ready to rate.

## PRACTICAL EXERCISE

**TIME REQUIRED** 2 hours

**EXERCISE** Provide the trainees with the 10 live cases.

- The trainees should work individually to determine if each case is ready to rate or not.
- If the trainee determines that the case is not ready to rate, he/she should:
  - Complete a deferral decision
  - Note the deficiencies

After the exercise is complete, do the following:

- As a group discuss the finding for each case and whether or not the case is ready to rate
- Ensure that information covered in the lesson is emphasized during the review of each case
- Ask if there are any questions about the information presented in each case

## LESSON REVIEW, ASSESSMENT, AND WRAP UP

**INTRODUCTION** The Ready to Rate Claims lesson is complete.

*Discuss the following:* Review each lesson objective and ask the trainees for any questions or comments.

**TIME REQUIRED** .5 hours

**LESSON OBJECTIVES** You have completed the Ready to Rate Claims lesson.

*Review the following:* The trainee should be able to:

- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify VSR and RVSR rating activity jurisdiction, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify issues that require a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify issues that require a deferred rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify the responsibilities of a VSR when making an entitlement decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify VSR authority to make an entitlement decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify the responsibilities of an RVSR when making a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet or references, identify RVSR authority to make a decision on claims requiring a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.
- Using the trainee handout packet, identify available resources when making a rating decision, with 85% accuracy.

**ASSESSMENT** The assessment will allow the participants to demonstrate their understanding of the information presented in this lesson.

Remind the trainees that they will not receive credit for this lesson until the assessment has been completed in the TMS.