PERSONAL COMPUTER GENERATED LETTERS (PCGL) JOB AID

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REFERENCES

- 38 CFR 3.103
- M21-1MR III, Subpart v, 2.B.9
- M21-1MR I, 2, A-C
- Reader-Focused Writing Manual

THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRESPONDENCE

It is extremely important to use written communication efficiently and effectively because most of the Department of Veterans Affair's (VA's) contact with the public is through correspondence.

Rules for Effective Correspondence

All correspondence generated by VA must provide complete, accurate, and understandable information, consider the reader's point of view, and be simple, sincere, and empathetic.

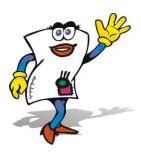
Reader-Focused Writing

Reader-Focused Writing (RFW) is a process and an approach to writing. It helps you, as a writer, think more clearly and work more efficiently. It helps the readers of VBA letters, memos, reports, brochures, and anything else we write to better understand and use what we have written.



"Didn't you get my e-mail?"

SIX (6) TYPES OF LETTERS USED BY VBA



The six types of letters the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) uses to correspond with the public are:

- **1. Pattern letters** -The creation of pattern letters or paragraphs is permissible if no existing letter or paragraph will serve the purpose. VA Central Office (VACO) periodically reviews pattern letters used at regional offices (ROs).
- **2. VA Form letters** Limit the use of VA form letters to the purpose for which the letter was created. Do not alter a printed VA form letter to apply to other situations. If a form letter does not apply to the situation, use a locally prepared letter instead.
- **3. Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) letters** The BDN provides certain acknowledgement, development, and award letters. It is important to have a thorough knowledge of the information provided in these types of letters before attempting to generate a BDN letter.
 - **Important:** BDN letters are printed and sent from Philadelphia. As a result, the file copy may not be received by the RO for several weeks after having been initiated.
- **4. Personal Computer Generated Letters (PCGL)** Letters Generated via PCGL

The following types of letters are generated via PCGL:

- Award letters
- Denial letters
- Pre- and post-determination letters
- Acknowledgement letters

Letters generated via PCGL are written using principles and techniques to ensure the reader's needs are the main focus; providing technically accurate and legally sufficient information. They are available for all RO personnel to use.

Note: When necessary, customize letters generated via PCGL to address the recipient's particular situation.

- **5. Veterans Service Network (VETSNET) letters -** VETSNET provides claimants with a computer generated award letter.
 - While the generation of VETSNET letters is normally the responsibility of the Pre-Determination Team within the Veterans Service Center, it is important to have a thorough knowledge of the information provided in these types of letters.
- **6. Locally prepared letters-** Use a locally prepared letter when none of the forms of correspondence shown in M21-1MR, Part II, 5.1.d through g are applicable.

TWO (2) TYPES OF PCGL LETTERS

DIRECT SERVICES



There are two types of letters that are located in the PCGL library with regard to M21-1MR, Part II, "Direct Services":

1. Civil Service Preference Letters

By law, Veterans who are disabled or who served on active duty in the U.S. armed forces during certain specified time periods or in military campaigns are entitled to preference over others when hiring from competitive lists of eligible candidates, and also in retention during a reduction in force (RIF).

The following civil service preference letters are available for use:

- NSC Pension
- 30% disability or greater
- At least 10%, but less than 30% disability
- Less than 10% disability
- Surviving Spouse
- Spouse of 100% Disabled Veteran
- Mother of Deceased Veteran
- Mother of 100% Disabled Veteran

2. Commissary/Exchange Eligibility Letters

Unlimited exchange and commissary store privileges are available to honorably discharged Veterans with a service-connected disability rated at 100%, unremarried surviving spouses of members, or retired members of the armed forces, and recipients of the Medal of Honor, and their dependents and orphans.

The following commissary letters are available for use:

- No Future Exam
- Future Exam
- Surviving Spouse

Important: VA provides certification of total disability.

Reservists and their dependents may also be eligible.

Note: These letters may be accessed on the Direct Services web site.

NOTIFICATION LETTER REQUIREMENTS



Decision notification letters must include the following:

- The decision(s) made
- Any applicable effective dates
- What evidence we considered (if a denial is involved)
- The reason(s) for the decision(s)
- The right to a hearing
- The right to representation
- The right to appeal

In accordance with M21-1, MR I.2.C.12.b, every post-adverse action notice, like a contemporaneous notice, must include the following elements:

- Statement of decision (including new rate(s), if applicable)
- Statement of applicable effective date(s)
- Detailed reasons for decision
- Overpayment information
- Appeal rights

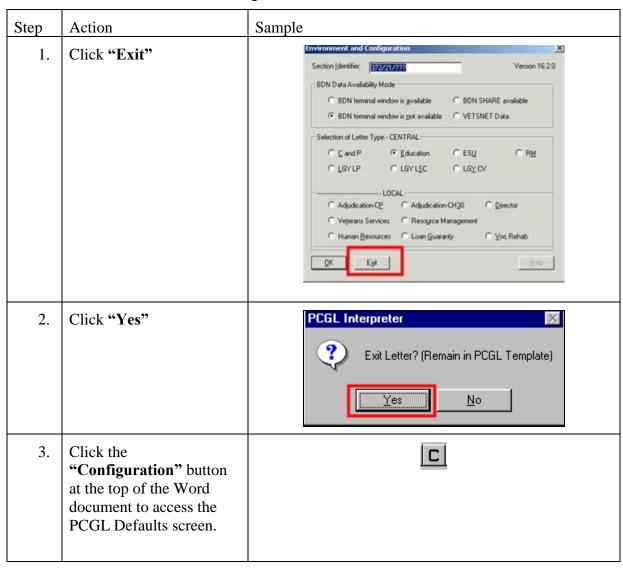
However, in a post-adverse action notice, the elements describe a completed rather than a proposed award action

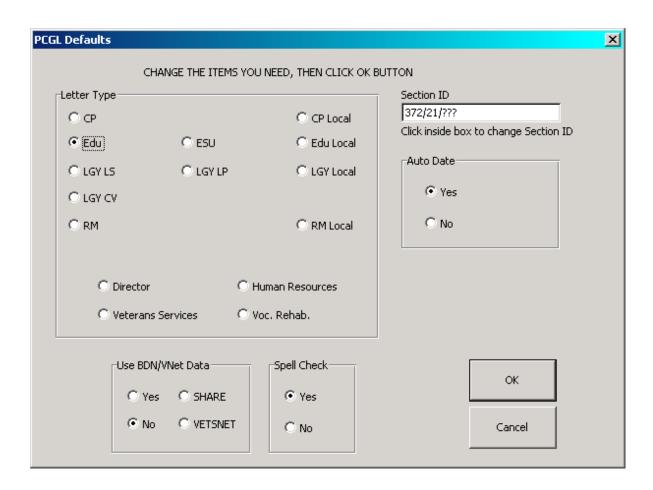
GETTING STARTED

Customizing PCGL is easy. Just follow the steps below and PCGL will run the way you want it to, every time, until you change it. Within this training guide, the term "BUTTON" is used to designate "radio buttons" which have a space for showing choices.

The PCGL shortcut is located in VBAPPS. Double click the PCGL shortcut to access the Environment and Configuration Screen.

To customize PCGL, do the following:





PCGL Defaults Screen

PCGL DEFAULTS SCREEN GUIDELINES

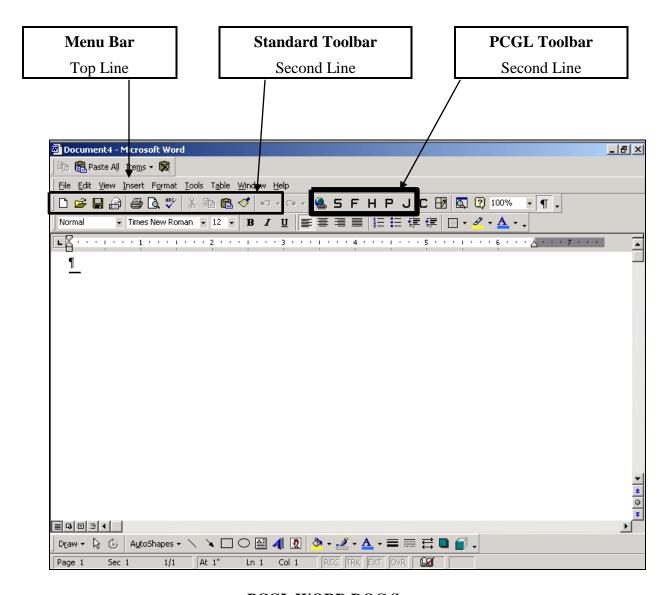
Block Title	Guidelines
Letter Type	Click on appropriate letter type as your default. You only have access to one letter type at a time.
Section ID	Whatever you type here will print on your PCGL letters in the reference lines along with the file number and stub name. We suggest that you follow local station guidelines.
Auto Date	If you select "YES", PCGL automatically inserts the current date on your PCGL letters.
Use BDN/VETSNET Data	In this selection box, you can only select one of the four selections at a time.
	If you select "YES," PCGL looks for an active BDN session (PIF). It extracts the file number, stub name and address and inserts them into your letter.
	If you do not use BDN data most of the time, the "NO" option is the best selection.
	If you select "SHARE," PCGL looks for an active BDN session (PIF) which was created through SHARE. It extracts the file number, stub name and address and inserts them into your letter.
	If you select "VETSNET," PCGL looks for an active VETSNET session (PIF). It extracts the file number, stub name and address and inserts them into your letter.
Spell Check	If you select "YES," PCGL automatically spell checks your PCGL letter.

After making your changes, click on "OK" to set the selected defaults. Remember, PCGL will run this way, every time, until you change it.

<u>Note</u>: If you do not want to change the defaults, click on "Cancel" to return to the PCGL WORD DOC screen.

UNDERSTANDING THE PCGL WORD DOC SCREEN

Before you begin PCGL, you should become familiar with the different parts of the WORD DOC screen. There are three primary toolbars on this screen.



PCGL WORD DOC Screen

Title	Description	
Menu Bar	Contains standard Word designations. Review Windows instructions for these items.	
Standard Toolbar	These buttons are standard for the Windows 2000 installation. Simply place your cursor over the button to find that button's function. Review Windows instructions for these items.	
	PCGL Toolbar	
5	Start PCGL Letter: Click on this button to go the "Environment and Configuration" screen (Figure 1.01) and prepare a standard PCGL letter.	
F	Free Form: Click on this button to go to the "Environment and Configuration" screen and prepare a Free Form letter using standard paragraphs. Check the appropriate appendix to see if you have free form options.	
	NOTE: In some letters, PCGL is suspended to allow you to enter text or edit the Word document. You must then use the 'F' button to "wake-up" PCGL to finish the letter.	
Н	Header: Click on this button to add header (RO name and address) in a non-standard (Free Form) PCGL letter.	
	NOTE: Headers are not viewable while the document is in Normal view; they are viewable while in the Page Layout view.	
	NOTE: You do not usually have to use this button as the PCGL program automatically inserts headers in your PCGL letters.	
P	Print: Click on this button to print your PCGL letter. (You may print your letter with or without the VA logo.)	
J	JetForm Merge: Click on this button to print a form or attachment with the claimant's file number and name on it.	
С	Configuration: Click on this button to go to the PCGL Defaults screen (Figure 1.02).	

STARTING AND EXITING PCGL

You can start PCGL several ways.

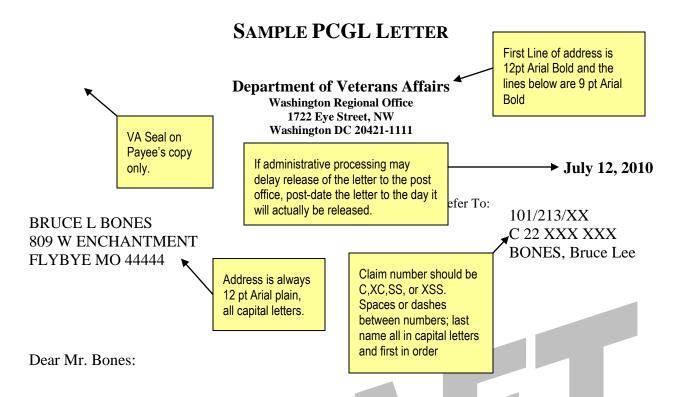
How Do I	Method	
Start PCGL from the initial	To start from the initial Windows screen:	
Windows screen?	1. Double click on the PCGL icon on your desktop.	
	If you do not have this icon, you can:	
	 Click Start Click VBAPPS Select PCGL from the list of shortcuts 	
Start PCGL from "Word for Windows"?	To start from "Word for Windows": 1. Click File 2. Click New 3. Double click PCGL.DOT in the displayed window.	
	Note: Entering PCGL through Word will not allow the system to install new PCGL updates.	
Go from BDN to PCGL?	To go from BDN to PCGL:	
	 Use the mouse and click the minus box at the top right corner of the BDN window so your desktop is visible. Then start PCGL using one of the above methods. 	
Exit or back up to a previous screen?	Each screen has an "Exit" button and/or a "Cancel" button. To Exit PCGL, or the current PCGL letter:	
	 Click on "Exit." When asked to confirm your choice, click on "YES" to exit PCGL. 	
	To back up to the previous screen:	
	 Click on "Cancel." When asked to confirm your choice, click on "YES." 	

HELPFUL HINTS

How do I enter dates?	Dates can be entered in the following formats: 1-1-04, 1/1/04, 01-01-04, or 01/01/04
How do I stop words showing up as misspelled when they are not?	Update your dictionary during Spell Check by adding local names and terms it does not have. Be sure these are spelled correctly!
How do I enter numbers?	Do not use commas unless you are in free text; e.g., 1000 instead of 1,000
What does the "CANCEL" button do?	Backs up one screen.
What does the "EXIT" button do?	Exit the PCGL program upon confirmation. (PCGL asks whether or not you really want to exit PCGL. Click on "YES" to exit or stop further processing the specific PCGL letter.)

CURSOR MOVEMENT & EDITING KEYS

Movement / Editing Function	Keyboard Shortcut
Go to beginning of document	Press "CTRL + HOME"
Go to end of document	Press "CTRL + END"
Go to page	1. Press F5
	 Type page number Press "ENTER"
Go to beginning of line	Press "HOME"
Go to end of line	Press "END"
Highlight a word	Double click on the word.
Highlight a <i>line</i>	Move the mouse to the left edge of the line and click.
Highlight a sentence	Place cursor anywhere within the sentence, press the CTRL key, and click once with the mouse.
Highlight a paragraph	Move the mouse to the left edge of the paragraph and double click.
Highlight entire document	Move the mouse to the left edge of the document, hold the CTRL key and click once with the mouse.
Insert	Place the cursor at the point you want the information inserted, and then type or paste the text.
Delete	To remove characters, words, or spaces use the "DELETE" key or highlight them with the mouse, and then press "DELETE."
Replace	Highlight the information to be replaced, and then type the new information.
Сору	Highlight the information to be copied. Click the Copy button on the tool bar, place the cursor at the new location and click the Paste button.



A special team has been selected to expeditiously process your claim. Your records are being returned to your home Regional Office. Please contact your home Regional Office should you have any questions.

We made a decision on your claim for service-connected compensation received on June 23, 2010.

Always spell out dates using month day, year

This letter tells you about your entitlement amount and payment start date and what we decided. It includes a copy of our rating decision that gives the evidence used and reasons for our decision. We have also included information about additional benefits, what to do if you disagree with our decision, and who to contact if you have questions or need assistance.

Your Award Amount and Payment Start Date

Your monthly entitlement amount is shown below:

The notification letter must show the new monthly VA disability rates. M21.1MR.III.v.2.B.9.b

Monthly Entitlement Amount	Payment Start Date	Reason For Change
\$243.00	July 1, 2009	Original Award
\$339.00	July 1, 2010	Special Monthly Compensation Adjustment

When Can You Expect Payment?

Your payment begins the first day of the month following your effective date. You will receive a payment covering the initial amount due under this award, minus any withholdings, in approximately 15 to 30 days. Payment will then be made at the beginning of each month

efits due for May are paid on or about June 1.

What did we decide? Refers to the different elements found in the Rating decision to include what was decided, how the decision was made, and what evidence was used to make the decision

inancial institution and account number that you have ment was deposited, please contact that financial

If this account is no longer open, please notify us immediately.

What Did We Decide?

We determined that the following condition(s) was/were related to your military service, so service-connection has been granted:

			_	The date eligibility to
Medical Description	Percent (%) Assigned	Effective Date		compensation is established. M21- 1MR.III.v.4.B.9.a
Diabetes mellitus type 2 with erectile dysfunction and peripheral neuropathy of the bilateral upper and lower extremities	20%	June 23, 2009	I	

We granted entitlement to special monthly compensation effective June 13, 2010 based on the loss of use of a creative organ.

We have deferred a decision on the following issue because we need additional information or evidence:

Cataracts

You will receive a separate letter regarding this deferred issue.

We have enclosed a copy of your Rating Decision for your review. It provides a detailed explanation of our decision, the evidence considered and the reasons for our decision. Your Rating Decision and this letter constitute our decision based on your claim received on June 23, 2010.

When a decision is the result of a rating, notification letters do not need to summarize the evidence considered or state the reason for the decision. Instead, attach the rating decision to the notification letter. M21-1MR.III.v.2.B.9.b

We enclosed VA Form 21-8764, "Disability Compensation Award Attachment-Important Information," which explains certain factors concerning your benefits.

How Do You Start Direct Deposit?

Your money may be deposited directly into your checking or savings account. This is the safest and most reliable way to get your money. For more information about Direct Deposit, please call us toll free by dialing 1-877-838-2778.

Are You Entitled to Additional Benefits?

You may be eligible for government life insurance if you:

- Were released from active duty after April 25, 1951,
- Are in good health (except for any service-connected conditions), and
- Apply within two years of this notification of your disability rating.

If you are totally disabled, you may be eligible to have your government life insurance premiums waived. The insurance is called Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI), and you should receive a package within two weeks. This package will contain information about the insurance and an application. If you do not receive an S-DVI package, please contact the Insurance Center to request additional information. Call the insurance toll free number, 1-800-669-8477, or visit the insurance web site, http://www.insurance.va.gov, for further information about Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance.

You may be entitled to medical care by the VA health care system for any service-connected disability. You may apply for medical care or treatment at the nearest medical facility. If you apply in person, present a copy of this letter. If you apply by writing a letter, include your VA file number and a copy of this letter.

REDUCE OR ELIMINATE YOUR MEDICAL CO-PAYMENTS

If you receive care at a VA medical facility, <u>please call our Health Benefits Call Center at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or notify your local VA medical center</u> of this change in your compensation benefits. This rating decision may reduce or eliminate your copayment for your VA-provided medical care. You may also be eligible for a refund based on this rating decision. Information regarding VA health care eligibility and co-payments is available at our web site <u>www.va.gov/healtheligibility.</u>

You should contact your State office of Veteran's Affairs for information on any tax, license, or fee-rated benefits for which you may be eligible as a Veteran (or surviving dependent of a Veteran). State offices of Veteran's Affairs are available at http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm.

You may be able to receive vocational rehabilitation employment services. The enclosed VA Form 28-8890, "Important Information about Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits," explains this benefit completely. To apply for this benefit, complete and return the enclosed VA Form 28-1900, "Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation."

What You Should Do If You Disagree with Our Decision

If you do not agree with our decision, you should write and tell us why. You have *one year* from the date of this letter to appeal the decision. The enclosed VA Form 4107, "Your Rights to Appeal Our Decision," explains your right to appeal.

The Veteran has one year from the date of the notification letter to appeal the decision M-21-1MR.I.5.B.4.a

If You	Here Is What to Do
Telephone	Call us at 1-800-827-1000. If you use a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), the number is 1-800-829-4833.
Use the Internet	Send electronic inquiries through the Internet at http://iris.va.gov.
Write	Put your full name and VA file number on the letter. Please send all correspondences to the address at the top of this letter.

In all cases, be sure to refer to your VA file number XX XXX XXX.

If you are looking for general information about benefits and eligibility, you should visit our web site at http://www.va.gov, or search the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at http://iris.va.gov.

We sent a copy of this letter to your representative, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the US (VFW), whom you can also contact if you have questions or need assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Jonathan C. Ogbonna, PhD

Jonathan C. Ogbonna, PhD

Veterans Service Center Manager

Contact us at: https://iris.va.gov

Veterans Service Center correspondence, whether generated by the BDN, form letter, or dictated letter, will be signed with the designations of the VSCM's name and title

Enclosure(s): Rating Decision

VA Form 21-8764

VA Form 28-1900

VA Form 28-8890

VA Form 4107

While the original rating must be printed on blue paper, the attached copy may be printed on either blue or white paper. M21-1MR.III.v.2.B.9.c

cc: VFW

Send a copy of all notification letters to the claimant's:

- Power of Attorney (POA), and/or
- Fiduciary, if the claimant is incompetent.

M21-1MR.III.v.2.B.8.c

Letter Distribution:

- One Copy of letter to POA (if applicable)
- One copy for the claimant
- One copy for the file

VA STYLE AND USAGE

Referring to the Department			
If You	Then		
Refer to the Department of Veterans Affairs	 You should: Use no apostrophe after Veterans Spell it out for a first reference and add the abbreviation VA in parentheses after the reference—e.g., Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Make subsequent references to "the Department" or "VA" 		
Need to distinguish VA from a State department of Veterans affairs	Use the full title "U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs"		
Use VA to refer to the Department of Veterans Affairs	Do <i>not</i> use "The" before the abbreviation—e.g., "VA announced today that"		
Use VA to refer to a subset of the Department	Use "the" in front of VA— e.g., "The VA task force announced today that"		
Refer to the Department's major operational administrations	Use Veterans Health Administration (VHA); Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA); and National Cemetery Administration (NCA)		
Have too many references to the abbreviations	Use "agency" to refer to any one administration and "agencies" to refer to the three as a group		

ACRONYMS		
If You	Then	
Use a phrase that has an acronym	Spell out the phrase the first time you use it with the acronym in parentheses after it – e.g., The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will release its latest statistics	
Use a phrase that has an acronym only one or twice in a document	Spell out the phrase each time	

New Words		
Term	Usage	
E-mail	All in lower case, separated with a hyphen	
Home page	Two words, lower case	
Online	One word, no hyphen, lower case	
Webmaster	One word, lower case	
Web page	Two words, lower case	
Web site	Two words, lower case	

SPACING WITHIN MEMOS AND LETTERS		
If You	Then	
Include an address	Put two spaces between the state abbreviation and the ZIP code	
Refer to a Post Office Box as an abbreviation	Put one space between the abbreviation—e.g., P. O. Box	
Refer to the United States as an abbreviation	Put one space between the abbreviation—e.g., U. S. Government	
Note: Use two spaces between each ser	ntence.	

PROOFREADING

Proofread for these four common mistakes:

- Proofread for repetition of words, such as "ready-to-rate cases cases."
- Check that you use "an" in front of words that begins with a vowel (or words that begin with a vowel sound, like hour).
- Refer to the Veteran by name, not "the Veteran."
- Do not rely totally on *Word*'s spell check, so you can catch words like "there" and "their."

PUNCTUATION		
If You	Then	
Refer to the month, date, and year	Put a comma after the date— e.g., January 2, 2003	
Refer to the month, date, and year anywhere within a sentence	Put a comma after the date and after the year—e.g., The regulation took effect on January 2, 2003, in the continental United States	
Refer to only the month and year	Do not use a comma between the month and year or after the year—e.g., The regulation took effect in January 2003 in the continental United States.	
Start your sentence with a month and year	Do not use a comma after the date—e.g., In January 2001 the law was in effect.	
Have a series of three items or more	Put a comma after each item except the last one—e.g., "Colors in the U. S. flag are red, white, and blue"	
Include a quotation in the sentence	Put the appropriate commas and periods inside the final quotation marks	

READER-FOCUSED WRITING CHECKLIST JOB AID

The *Reader-Focused Writing Checklist Job Aid* will help you go through your document point by point to make sure that you have addressed everything from the main message all the way to the formatting. Use the job aid with every document that you write to ensure that your document is reader focused.

Review the Document for Message and Content	
☐ Is the main message up front?	
☐ Is the message clear?	
☐ Is there unnecessary information?	
☐ Are there places where there is not enough information?	
Review the Document for Effective Organization	
☐ Have you arranged the document in a logical order?	
☐ Have you logically arranged each section?	
☐ Have you used headings effectively?	
☐ Is the length of the document and each section appropriate?	
Review the Document for Effective Paragraphs	
☐ Are the individual paragraphs too long?	
☐ Do the paragraphs begin with a topic sentence?	
☐ Do the first sentences of the sections repeat or paraphrase the headings	?
☐ Do all the sentences in the paragraphs relate to the main idea?	
Review the Document for Effective Sentences	
☐ Are any sentences too long or too short?	
☐ Have you used active voice appropriately most of the time?	
☐ Have you used simple, short sentences?	
☐ Have you kept the subject, verb, and object together?	
☐ Have you used action verbs instead of nouns made out of verbs?	
☐ Have you written in the positive or simple negative wherever possible?	?
Have you used the reader's words, defining terms where necessary?	
Do sentences project the proper tone?	
☐ Are sentences free of unnecessary jargon?	
Review the Document for Proper Mechanics	
☐ Have you checked spelling with more than Word's Spell Check?	

☐ Are all grammatical rules observed?
☐ Are all punctuation rules observed?
Review the Document for Effective and Proper Format
☐ Have you used effective emphasis techniques?
☐ Have you used the correct typographical elements (fonts, margin, spacing, etc.)?
Additional:

Imaging Documents for Virtual VA

Documents and forms which are generated or received will be imaged for inclusion into Virtual VA electronic folders (eFolders).

This function is accomplished by using the Virtual VA Barcode Capture utility.



Virtual VA electronic folders (eFolders) are populated with electronic documents from various sources as follows:

- Virtual VA Scanning Sites Milwaukee, WI; Philadelphia, PA; Providence, RI; Salt Lake City, UT; St. Paul, MN; and Winston-Salem, NC.
- Batch File Interface (BFI) A server that processes mass document feeds from various sources as follows: HOV contract scanning services, QTC Medical Service, Inc. (QTC) and MES Solutions, Inc. (MES) medical disability examination contractors, RBA 2000 promulgated ratings, BDN end-of-day Letters, PCGL award letters, VETSNET master record conversions, etc.
- End User Desktop Inserts Ad hoc documents inserted electronically from a user's desktop.

All electronic documents, regardless of the source, require sufficient indexing information (such as a claim number) to store them within the correct Virtual VA eFolder.

Documents and forms which will be imaged include, but are not limited to:

- EVRs
- printouts of E02 (BEVR) screens
- prints from the SHARE system
- prints from PCGL and BDN letters
- documents relating to birth, marriage, divorce, or death
- VA Forms
- 20-572, Request for Change of Address/Cancellation of Direct Deposit
- 20-8270, C&P Master Record-Audit Writeout
- 21-441, Special Apportionment Decision
- 21-555, Certificate of Legal Capacity to Receive and Disburse Benefits
- 21-674, Request for Approval of School Attendance
- 21-686c, Declaration of Status of Dependents
- 21-4138, Statement in Support of Claim
- 21-4165, Pension Claim Questionnaire for Farm Income
- 21-4185, Report of Income from Property or Business
- 21-4193, Notice to VA of Veteran or Beneficiary Incarcerated in Penal Institution
- 21-5427, Corpus of Estate Determination
- 21-8049, Request for Details of Expenses

- 21-8416, Medical Expense Report21-8947, Compensation and Pension Award