PROCESSING RATINGS DECISIONS TRAINEE HANDOUT

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OBJECTIVES

PREREQUISITE TRAINING:

This is an entry level VSR Course.

OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this lesson is:

- Define and identify a Rating Decision document
- Define and identify a denial rating
- Define and identify rating decisions which result in a combined evaluation of 0% 20%
- Define and identify rating decisions which result in a combined evaluation of 30% 100%
- Define a confirmed and continued rating decisions
- Identify the actions required to process a rating decision in either category
- Use VBMS-A/VETSNET Award systems for processing a rating decision.

TIME REQUIRED: 4 hours: by lecture, class participation, and demos

REFERENCES

- Rate Tables
- M21-1, Part III, Subpart iv, 6. C, Completing the Rating Decision Narrative
- M21-1. Part III, Subpart iv, 6. D, Codesheet Section
- M21-1, Part III, Subpart v.2.A, Decision Authorization
- M21-1, Part III, Subpart v.2.B, Decision Notices

TOPIC 1: RATING DECISION DOCUMENT

NOTE: Please reference ATTACHMENT: SAMPLE RATING DECISION for the discussion and review of the below components of the Rating Decision.

Decision -

Is a formal determination on all questions of fact and law affecting the provision of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits to a claimant.

Rating Decision -

Is a record purposes document detailing the formal determination made by the regional office (RO) rating activity regarding one or more issues of benefit entitlement. The rating decision states the decisions made and provides an explanation supporting each decision.

The rating decision is composed of a Narrative explanation of the determination on benefit entitlement and a Codesheet containing information about the claimant, the current decision, past decisions, and the current state of entitlement to compensation and/or pension benefits.

The table below provides information about the sections of a rating decision.

Rating Decision Sections	Description
Narrative	Contains -
	• Introduction
	Decision for each issue considered
	Evidence
	 Reasons for Decision for each issue considered, and
	References
Codesheet	Contains –
	data table
	Jurisdiction
	 coded conclusion,
	 SPECIAL NOTATION and TEMPLATE fields, and
	• signature(s).

NARRATIVE

Introduction -

The purpose of the Introduction is to

- identify the claimant, and
- acknowledge the Veteran's qualifying service, including any special considerations relevant to the claim, such as former prisoner of war (FPOW) status.

Note: The level of detail in the introduction depends on the complexity of each issue.

Decision -

The Decision section lists the specific outcome for each issue addressed, such as the award or denial of

- service connection (SC)
- an increased evaluation, or
- an ancillary benefit, such as special monthly compensation (SMC).

Where at least one (but not every) issue must be deferred, the Decision will also list the deferred issue(s).

Evidence -

The Evidence section is a listing of each piece of evidence considered in arriving at the decision, which may include but is not limited to

- service treatment records (STRs)
- service personnel records
- private and VA treatment records
- VA or contract examination reports, to include Disability Benefits Questionnaires
- lay statements, and/or
- written or oral testimony, to include hearing transcripts.

Reasons for Decision -

The purpose of the Reasons for Decision is to concisely cite and evaluate all relevant facts considered in making the decision.

References -The References section of the Narrative is automatically generated by VBMS-R. It refers the reader to 38 U.S.C., as well as the VA website, for the laws regarding VA benefits.

CODESHEET

Data Table

Entries are generated by the VBMS-R system based on user-entered data on the MASTER RECORD tab and/or DISABILITY DECISION INFORMATION screens.

Jurisdiction

The *Jurisdiction* of the *Codesheet*

- appears below the heading section
- explains why the case is before the rating activity
- refers to the claim at issue, and
- cites the pertinent jurisdictional date.

Coded Conclusion

A *coded conclusion* is the section of the *Codesheet* of a rating decision which contains

Subject to Compensation

- a summary of information on the status of benefits, and
- all decided issues.

The coded conclusion on the *Codesheet* must contain the following information for all service-connected (SC) disabilities, both individually and as combined totals:

- current percentage evaluation
- current effective date
- future percentage evaluation, if applicable, and
- future effective date, if applicable.

Combined Evaluation for Compensation

- 10% from 09/22/2008
- 40% from 09/23/2000
- 70% from 10/31/2106

Not Service Connected/Not Subject to Compensation

Back Condition

Not Service Connected, Not Incurred/Caused By Service

Original Date of Denial: 09/23/2000

Special Notations and Notifications Templates

The primary purposes of notations made in the SPECIAL NOTATION field and the notification template fields on the *Codesheet* are to

• record special remarks or approvals applicable to the rating

decision, and

• communicate an instruction or administrative message to the authorization activity.

Note: All special notations and templates are generated through input in the ISSUE MANAGEMENT tab of VBMS-R.

Signatures

Rating decisions must contain the decision maker's digital signature on the bottom of the last page of the *Codesheet*.

A rating decision *signature* is defined as

- an electronic signature certification statement as shown in M21-1, Part III, Subpart iv, 6.D, and
- the user's
 - o Local Area Network identification (LAN ID), and
 - o job title.

TOPIC 2: TYPES OF RATING DECISIONS

DENIAL RATINGS

The characteristics of a generated award and notification letter for Denial Rating Decisions.

Denial Rating Decisions

- Entitlement to service connection is not granted
- If there is a previous denial rating for a condition (This will be indicated as a "previously denied condition, and remains denied.")
- Award will result in a zero net effect (no monetary compensation)
- Example of Denial decision text:
 - Service connection for <u>(condition)</u>..." "... is denied."

SERVICE CONNECTED GRANT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVICE CONNECTED AWARD AND NOTIFICATION LETTER FOR COMBINED EVALUATION OF 0% TO 20% RATING DECISIONS.

What initiates a 0-20% service connected rating? Any claimed disability that is granted service connection.

- Compensable evaluations of 10% to 20% or
- Non compensable evaluations of 0% or
- 10% based on multiple 0% under (38 CFR 3.324)

Characteristics of a 0-20% rating decision

- Claim Types:
 - Original,
 - Non-Original
 - New condition, Increase, Secondary, Reopen grant

What to look for when processing a 0-20% rating decision

- Check rating decision for the following:
 - Date of claim
 - Effective Dates
 - Payment dates
 - Reason for decision
 - Consistency with issues claimed (i.e. § 5103 notice)

What to look for in the system for processing a 0-20% rating decision

- Check SHARE/VBMS for the following:
 - Correct Veteran and C-Number
 - Name and Address of Veteran
 - Correct Date of claim
 - Changes in dates
 - Consistency with last rating, if applicable
 - Military Payment Information to include Retired Pay, Severance or Separation Pay
 - Rating decision conditions matches VBMS-A/VETSNET data

Important note when a rating is complete:

* Once a rating on service connection is completed, dependency information submitted on a VA Form 21-526, VA Form 21-686c, and/or VA Form 21-674, requires a decision from the VSR even when the Veteran is less than 30% service-connected.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVICE CONNECTED AWARD AND NOTIFICATION LETTER FOR COMBINED EVALUATION OF 30% RATING DECISIONS OR HIGHER

What initiates a 30% or higher service connected rating? Any claimed disability that is granted service connection.

- Compensable evaluations of 30% and higher or
- Can be Individual Unemployability or
- Can be Permanent and Total and entitled Ancillary Benefits

Characteristics of a 30% or higher rating decision

- Claim Types:
 - Original,
 - Non-Original
 - New condition, Increase, Secondary, Reopen grant

What to look for when processing a 30% or high rating decision

- Check rating decision for the following:
 - Date of Claim
 - Effective Dates
 - Payment Dates
 - Reason for Decision
 - Consistency with issues claimed (i.e. § 5103 notice)

What to look for in the system for processing a 30% or higher rating decision

- Check SHARE/VBMS for the following:
 - Correct Veteran and C-Number
 - Name and Address of Veteran
 - Correct Date of Claim
 - Changes in dates
 - Consistency with last rating, if applicable
 - Military Payment Information to include Retried Pay, Severance or Separation Pay
 - Rating decision condition matches VBMS-A/VETSNET data
 - Dependency information

CONFIRMED AND CONTINUED RATING DECISION

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GENERATED AWARD AND NOTIFICATION LETTER FOR CONFIRMED AND CONTINUED (C&C) AND DENIAL RATING DECISIONS.

Confirmed and Continued Rating Decisions

- Rating decision that does not change the current evaluation of the Veteran.
- If the Veteran is receipt of payment, it will continue unchanged
- A prior rating decision has to exist for the Veteran regarding the conditions being sought. (Veteran asking an increase on a service connected condition)
- Award will result in a zero net effect (no monetary compensation)
- Actually a denial as the decision is to continue the current decision
- Examples of Confirmed and Continued decision text:
 - The evaluation of <u>(condition)</u>, which is currently <u></u>% disabling **is confirmed** and continued."
 - The previous denial of service connection for <u>(condition)</u> is confirmed and continued."

TOPIC 3: IDENTIFY WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND WHAT TO DO

What to Look For

- Consistency with the issues claimed (claim & 5103 Notice) ensure proper development was completed
- Effective Date Ensure the rating decision has the correct effective date
- Reasons for Decision Ensure the rating decision explains the reason for the rating
- Changes in Dates Review the rating decision for multiple effective dates.
- Rating decision condition matches VBMS-A/VETSNET data Ensure all conditions have been rated and implemented into the system
- Consistency with last Rating, if applicable Review rating decision code sheet to ensure prior conditions are listed on new rating decision

Notification Letter Requirements

Notification Letter: ADL/PCGL format for Grant, Increase and 0% combined. If a
notification letter cannot be completed in ADL, the notification letter must be done in
PCGL

(Please refer to the Live Manual for proper procedures for loading non-ADL letters into VBMS - M21-1.III.ii.4.G, Folder Maintenance)

- 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 additional benefits, if applicable
- Once a rating on service connection is completed, dependency information submitted on a VA Form 21-526, VA Form 21-686c, and/or VA Form 21-674, requires a decision from the VSR even when the Veteran is less than 30% service-connected.

This is accomplished by adding the dependents in SHARE/VBMS and adding on the award as "not an award dependent" in VBMS-A.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER – Your job as a VSR is to review the Rating Decision to ensure that all requirements of promulgation have been met.

It's not your responsibility to rate the claim.

Identify What You Should Do

- Become familiar with current Rating Decision
- Check accuracy of Name, Address, POA, etc.
- Find the current claim take note of date stamp
- Check DOC against SHARE/VBMS and Rating
- Check Decisions, Narrative, and Code Sheet
- Check § 5103 notice and any other development
- Look at the current rating vs. previous 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.)
- Print and organize letter
- Submit for authorization/review

JOB AID 1: ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND REQUIRED FORMS

These attachments are required for PCGL Notification letters. Additional benefits paragraphs are included in ADL notification letters.

Combined Evaluation	Additional Benefits	Enclosures
0%	 Service Disabled Veterans Insurance Veterans Health Administration (VHA): No charge for medical treatment to a rated service connected disability 	VA Form 4107
10%-20%	 Service Disabled Veterans Insurance Veterans Health Administration (VHA): No charge for medical treatment to a rated service connected disability Vocational Rehab: Financial assistance for Post Education 	 VA Form 28-1900 VA Form 28-8890 VA Form 21-8764 VA Form 4107
30%-90%; No IU	 Service Disabled Veterans Insurance Veterans Health Administration (VHA): No charge for medical treatment to a rated service connected disability Vocational Rehab: Financial assistance for Post Education Dependency Solicitation 	 VA Form 28-1900 VA Form 28-8890 VA Form 21-8764 VA Form 21-686(c) VA Form 4107
100% or IU; NOT P&T	 Service Disabled Veterans Insurance Veterans Health Administration (VHA): No charge for medical treatment to a rated service connected disability Vocational Rehab: Financial assistance for Post Education Dependency Solicitation Department of Education Disability Discharge Loan Program 	 VA Form 28-1900 VA Form 28-8890 VA Form 21-8764 VA Form 21-686(c) VA Form 4107

service connected disability 100% P&T or Post Education **Dependency Solicitation** IU P&T

- Service Disabled Veterans Insurance
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA): No charge for medical treatment to a rated
- Vocational Rehab: Financial assistance for
- Department of Education Disability Discharge Loan Program
- Commissary
- Insurance Waiver
- Champ VA
- **DEA**

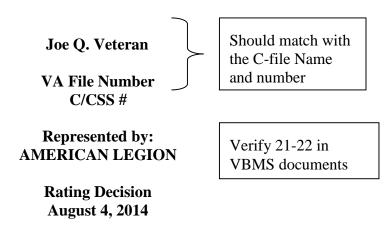
- VA Form 21-8764
- VA Form 21-8760
- VA Form 28-1900
- VA Form 28-8890
- VA Form 21-686(c)
- VA Form 22-5490
- VA Pamphlet 22-73-3
- VA Form 4107

JOB AID 2: POST-D CHECK LIST

- Confirm and Verify correct Veteran and C-file/E-Folder
- Confirm and Verify correct Date of Claim established
- Check SHARE (Corporate record, if no Master record or processing initial award)
 - Name and Address
 - POA
 - VID screen (Service Information)
 - Svc is verified either VADS/Verified Note: If service is not verified the VSR must verify service via Participant Profile to process award.
- Check Military Payment Information
 - Severance
 - Separation
 - Retired Pay
- Review Rating Decision for correct C-file and Signature (electronic)
- Confirm and Verify claim type and all issues have been addressed and properly developed
- Confirm and Verify all conditions on rating decision
- Input Award via VBMS-A/VETSNET C&P Awards
- Notify claimant via ADL or PCGL Letter
 - Date of Claim correct
 - Rates, Dates and Reasons
 - Is there any withholdings
 - Additional dependency benefits
 - All claimed disability information: condition, rating % and effective date
 - If multiple conditions don't add up = combined para
 - Additional development (if applicable)
 - Additional Benefits included (if applicable)
 - Notice of appeal rights
 - Required Attachments and Forms included

ATTACHMENT: SAMPLE RATING DECISION

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS Regional Office



INTRODUCTION

The records reflect that you are a veteran of the Vietnam Era. You served in the Navy from May 12, 1965 to April 4, 1967. You filed an original disability claim that was received on May 27, 2014. Based on a review of the evidence listed below, we have made the following decision(s) on your claim.

DECISION

All claimed disabilities should be addressed in rating decision

- 1. Service connected for tinnitus is granted with an evaluation of 10 percent effective May 27, 2014.
- 2. Service connection for bilateral hearing loss is granted with an evaluation of 10 percent effective May 27, 2014.

EVIDENCE

Include evidence considered at arriving at this decision

- VA Form 21-526EZ, Veteran's Fully Developed Claim, received May 27, 2014
- DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty for service from May 12, 1965 to April 4, 1967, received May 30, 2014
- Service Treatment Records for service from May 12, 1965 to April 4, 1967, received May 30, 2014
- VA Examination, Charm City VAMC, received June 20, 2014

• VAMC (Veterans Affairs Medical Center) treatment records, Charm City VAMC, from February 24, 2011 through June 16, 2012, received June 20, 2014

REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Service connection for tinnitus.

Service connection for tinnitus has been established as directly related to military service.

Service connection is warranted because your military occupational specialty (MOS) of machinists mate is consistent with acoustic trauma and your tinnitus has been linked to that acoustic trauma.

Your VA examiner opined that it is at least as likely as not that your tinnitus is due to military noise exposure.

An evaluation of 10 percent is assigned from May 24, 2014.

The effective date of this grant is May 27, 2014. Service connection has been established from the day VA received your claim. When a claim of service connection is received more than one year after discharge from active duty, the effective date is the date VA received the claim.

We have assigned a 10 percent evaluation for your tinnitus based on:

• Recurrent tinnitus

A single evaluation for recurrent tinnitus is assigned whether the sound is perceived in one ear, both ears, or in the head.

This is the highest schedular evaluation allowed under the law for tinnitus.

2. Service connection for bilateral hearing loss.

We have granted your claim for bilateral hearing loss.

Service connection is warranted because your military occupational specialty (MOS) of machinists mate is consistent with acoustic trauma and your hearing loss has been linked to that acoustic trauma.

Your VA examiner opined that it is at least as likely as not that your hearing loss is due to military noise exposure.

VA examination findings show the left ear with 40 percent discrimination. Decibel (dB) loss at the puretone threshold of 500 Hertz (Hz) is 80, at 1000 Hz is 85, at 2000 Hz is 85, at 3000 Hz is 85, and at 4000 Hz is 90. The average decibel loss is 86 in the left ear.

The right ear shows a speech discrimination of 94 percent. Your right ear Decibel (dB) loss at the puretone threshold of 500 Hertz (Hz) is 10, at 1000 Hz is 40, at 2000 Hz is 30, at 3000 Hz is 20, and at 4000 Hz is 20. The average decibel loss is 28 in the right ear.

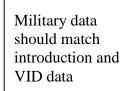
An evaluation of 10 percent is assigned from May 27, 2014.

The effective date of this grant is May 27, 2014. Service connection has been established from the day VA received your claim. When a claim of service connection is received more than one year after discharge from active duty, the effective date is the date VA received the claim.

REFERENCES:

Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Pensions, Bonuses and Veterans' Relief contains the regulations of the Department of Veterans Affairs that govern entitlement to all Veteran benefits. For additional information regarding applicable laws and regulations, please consult your local library, or visit us at our web site, www.va.gov.

Rating Decision	Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration				Page 1 of 1 08/04/2014
NAME OF VETERAN VETERAN SAMPLE NAME	VA FILE NUMBER XX XXX XXX	SOCIAL SECURITY NR XXX-XX-XXXX		POA ALG	СОРҮ ТО



		ACTIVE DUTY	
EOD	RAD	BRANCH	CHARACTER OF DISCHARGE
05/12/1965	04/04/1967	Navy	Honorable

		LEGACY (CODES
ADD'L SVC CODE	COMBAT CODE	SPECIAL PROV CDE	FUTURE EXAM DATE
			None

JURISDICTION: Original Disability Claim Received 05/27/2014 ←

Same as Date of Claim (DOC)

ASSOCIATED CLAIM(s): 110; Initial Live Comp <8 issues: 05/27/2014

SUBJECT TO COMPENSATION (1.SC)

6260 TINNITUS

Service Connected, Vietnam, Incurred Static Disability

10% from 05/27/2014

6100 BILATERAL HEARING LOSS

Service Connected, Vietnam, Incurred Static Disability

10% from 05/27/2014

All conditions should match with disabilities in Decision with

Original Claim

COMBINED EVALUATION FOR COMPENSATION:

20% from 05/27/2014 **<**

Effective Date

I certify that I have reviewed and electronically signed this decision, VBADENJOHNSD

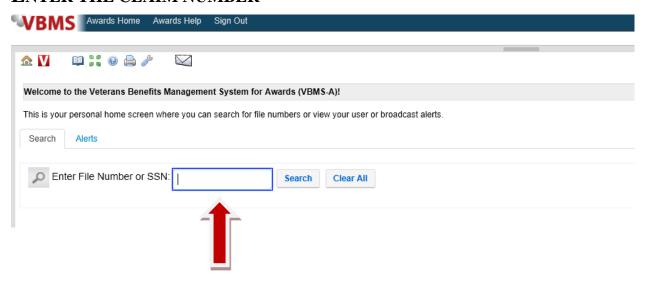
PROCESSING RATING DECISION EXAMPLE

The first step in promulgating a rating decision is to generate an award. The steps below describe how to generate an award in VBMS A. (Vetsnet can be used as well to generate an award.)

LOG INTO VBMS-A

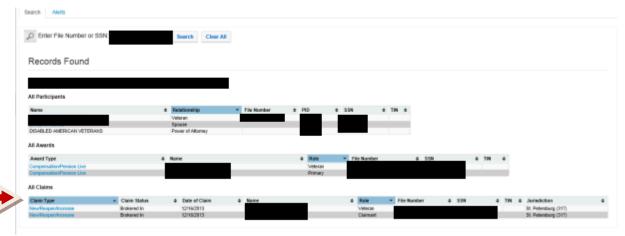
STEP #1

ENTER THE CLAIM NUMBER



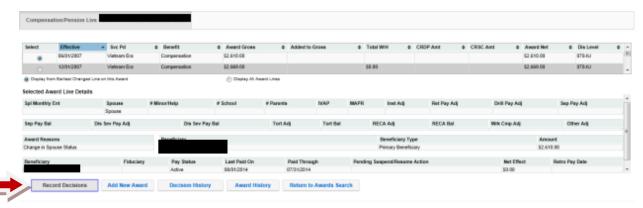
Step #2

Highlight the claim you intend to process



Step #3

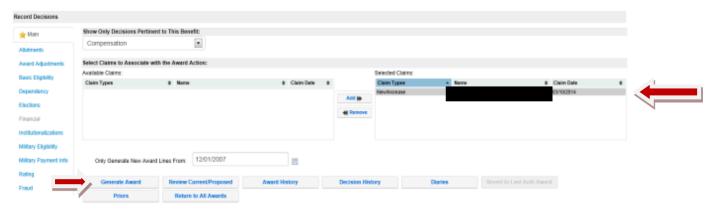
Select Record Decisions



Note: If this is an original claim (110/010) you may be required to add an award record

Step #4

Generate Award (Note: You need to make sure that there is a claim in the box below)



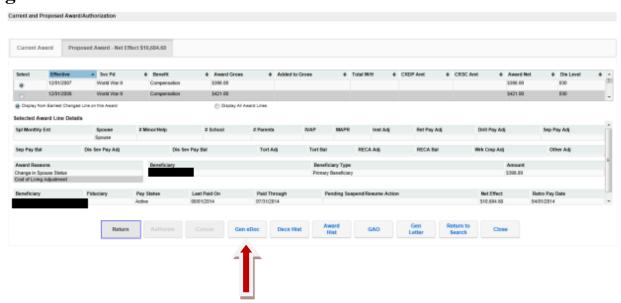
Step #5

This screen is to verify the payment address, via direct deposit or mailing address for a paper check. Click continue generation.



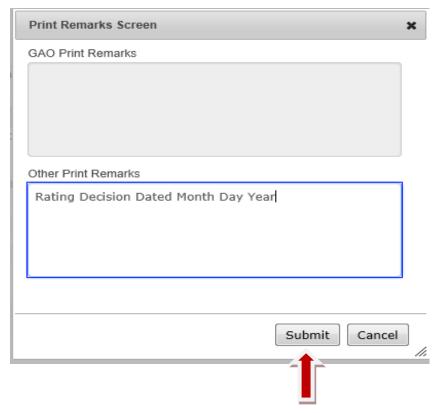
Step #6

On this screen, preview the letter to make sure it is complete. Then, generate eDoc.



Step #7

This is the remarks screen. By clicking "Submit", the eDoc will appear in a separate window.



Important: Input a brief remark to indicate the purpose of this award generation.

AWARD PRINT SAMPLE

DRAFT

STATION OF JURISDICTION: MUSKOGEE (351) FILE NUMBER

FILE NUMBER

Claim Information

Date of Claim	Type of Claim	End Product	POA	Claimant	Claim Jurisdiction
03/10/2014	New/Increase	020	VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS		Washington (372)
			OF THE US		

Miscellaneous Data

Net Effect of Award as of Generation	Cross Reference Employable		Competent Status	Fiduciary Status	PGF Loc
Denial or C	ting decision reno onfirmed and Co e net effect will a	ntinued	Competent	Pay Direct	

Verified Service

Name B	Branch	Duty	EOD	RAD	Char Disch
A	Army	Active Duty		10/11/1945	Honorable

Primary Beneficiary Information

Mailing Address	Payment Address	Date of Birth:
		Gender: Male
		SSN:

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

Which two programs can be used to generate an award letter to the Veteran?
2. Where can you find the combined evaluation for a Veteran on a Rating Decision?
3. What is the main difference between a rating decision of 20% or less and 30% or higher
 4. A VSR should do all of the following except a. Become familiar with the current Rating Decision b. Check accuracy of Name, Address, POA etc. c. Question the evaluation of the Rating Decision d. Generate the notification letter using ADL or PCGL
5. If the Veteran submits all relevant dependency information on a VA Form 21-686c along whis original claim, but is only granted 10% service connection, dependency should be addressed in the notification letter? (True/False)
6. What are the two (2) systems used to generate Compensation awards?
and
7. When generating a PCGL notification letter, what is the minimum combined disability evaluation percentage required before the Veteran receives information about Vocational Rehabilitation?