

AIVetGuide

Decision Letter Guide

Read VA decisions, reasons, effective dates, and next options.

Important

Use this guide as educational preparation only. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or a guarantee of VA benefits. For official help, contact VA or an accredited representative.

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Understand Your VA Decision Letter

A VA decision letter explains what VA decided, what evidence was considered, the rating or denial reason, and what options may be available next. This guide helps veterans read the letter in an organized way.

Start here

Do not choose a review option until you understand the exact issue: service connection, rating percentage, effective date, or missing evidence.

What to look for first

- [] The date of the decision letter.
- [] Each issue VA decided.
- [] Whether each issue was granted, denied, deferred, continued, increased, decreased, or proposed for change.
- [] The rating percentage assigned for each granted issue.
- [] The effective date for each granted issue.
- [] The combined rating and monthly payment information, if included.
- [] The evidence list showing what VA reviewed.
- [] The reasons for decision and any favorable findings.
- [] The deadline and instructions for review or appeal options.

Decision letter sections in plain language

Section	Why it matters
Issue / decision	Shows exactly what VA decided for each claimed condition.
Evidence reviewed	Shows what records VA considered. Missing evidence may point to what you should submit next.
Reasons for decision	Explains why VA granted, denied, or assigned a certain rating.
Favorable findings	Helpful facts VA accepted. These can matter in later review options.
Rating percentage	The severity level VA assigned for each service-connected condition.
Effective date	The date VA uses to start benefits if compensation is awarded.
Payment start date	The date monthly payments begin according to VA rules.
Review rights	Explains options and deadlines if you disagree.

Common denial reasons and next evidence ideas

Denial reason	Evidence to consider
No current disability	Current diagnosis, treatment records, test results, specialist evaluation, or records showing ongoing symptoms.
No in-service event	Service treatment records, personnel records, incident reports, deployment records, buddy statements, or duty history.
No nexus/link	Medical opinion, continuity of symptoms, secondary-service-connection evidence, or records showing a relationship.
Not severe enough for higher rating	Current treatment records, symptom log, work impact, flare-ups, functional limits, DBQ, or lay statements.
Effective date disagreement	Intent to File confirmation, prior claim history, decision history, date entitlement arose, or records showing when the increase became factually shown.

Decision review planning worksheet

- ☐ What issue do I disagree with?
- ☐ Is the problem service connection, rating percentage, effective date, or something else?
- ☐ What exact sentence in the decision explains VA's reason?
- ☐ What evidence did VA review?
- ☐ What evidence did VA miss or not have?
- ☐ Do I have new and relevant evidence?
- ☐ Do I believe VA made an error based on the evidence already in the file?
- ☐ Do I need a senior reviewer, new evidence review, or Board review?
- ☐ What is the deadline in my decision letter?

Next-step options

- If the claim was granted and the rating is correct, keep the decision for your records.
- If the condition worsens later, consider whether an increased-rating claim is appropriate.
- If VA denied the claim and you have new and relevant evidence, review Supplemental Claim rules.
- If VA had the evidence but you believe the decision was wrong, review Higher-Level Review rules.
- If you want a Veterans Law Judge to review the issue, review Board Appeal options.
- If you are unsure, consider an accredited representative before the deadline.

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Official Sources Used

These guides summarize public VA information and should be checked against the official source before filing or responding to a VA decision.

- [The VA Claim Process After You File](#)
- [What Your Claim Status Means](#)
- [Download VA Benefit Letters](#)
- [View Your Disability Ratings](#)
- [About Disability Ratings](#)
- [Disability Compensation Effective Dates](#)
- [VA Decision Reviews And Appeals](#)
- [Choosing A Decision Review Option](#)

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