

VA EXAMINER DIGEST

**Expert tips for
navigating your
C&P Exam**

Introduction



Welcome to the *VA Examiner Digest*, your guide to navigating your Compensation and Pension (C&P) exams with confidence.

Inside, you'll find:

- **Preparation tips** for what to bring and how to present your case.
- **Communication strategies** to clearly explain your condition.
- **Insights on unique claims**, including exposure-related and mental health assessments.

Use this digest as a trusted resource to understand your rights and make informed decisions on your VA journey.



About Hill & Ponton

Since 1986, Hill & Ponton has been a trusted leader in VA Disability law, dedicated solely to helping veterans across the United States secure the benefits they deserve. Founded by Navy veteran Brian Hill and attorney Carol Ponton, our firm is rooted in compassion, advocacy, and a relentless pursuit of justice. We work on a contingency basis, meaning you only pay if we win your case, ensuring that every veteran has access to quality legal representation without upfront costs.

Our team's unmatched experience and dedication have led to a 96% success rate in cases we accept. With over 30,000 claims handled and \$300 million in benefits recovered, we are committed to being your ally throughout the VA claims process.

Our resources and content are enriched by insights from certified medical professionals and disability examiners who contribute valuable clinical perspectives to support veterans' understanding of the VA system.

If you've been denied benefits or are trying to increase your rating, contact us today for a free case evaluation and see how we can help you fight for the benefits you deserve.

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How do I know if my C&P Exam went well?

BY NATHAN COSTUIC, RN, APRN, FNP-BC - VA MEDICAL EXAMINER

Compensation and Pension Exams (C&P) are one of the most critical components of the VA claims process and often central to the success or failure of a claim when seeking to establish service connection for a disability.

As a VA examiner who performs these types of exams, I often encounter veterans who have been on the receiving end of a poorly-conducted exam or examiner's report.

While you won't really know how your exam went until you either see the completed exam report or receive a Veterans Affairs disability letter, there are a few tell-tale signs to clue you in to the successfulness of the visit... even while you're in the middle of one!

Understanding these factors can help you best prepare for your C&P exam or ask for another one if things really went sour.



What is a Compensation and Pension Exam?

Compensation and Pension (C&P) Exams are assessments conducted by medical providers to determine the clinical status of your disability, document it in a Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ), and oftentimes produce a Medical Opinion as to whether or not your disability was caused by military service.

Here's a few general items that are helpful to know about your C&P exam:

1. The VA claims process consists of a lot of "hurry up and wait."

Months may go by after veterans initially submit a VA disability claim before a C&P exam is suddenly scheduled, sometimes only with a few days' notice.

Please note you may not always receive a notification in time.

2. The VA or contracted VA doctor will not call you to determine a preferred date/time.

They will simply notify you of your appointment time via mail/email/phone, with the option to reschedule if the appointment coincides with a life event.

3. C&P exams tend to feel unusual.

After discussing all your disability symptoms, the provider will not recommend treatment since the purpose of the exam is purely to assess rather than to treat.

4. Multiple C&P exams are often ordered for the same claim.

This can lead to some justifiable puzzlement on why you need to be seen again.

Just know that the VA often likes to see multiple opinions and exam results from different providers to evaluate your claim.

5. Don't be surprised if your disability exam was not conducted at a VA Medical Center

Your VA regional office often hires outside contractors to help furnish exam results more rapidly and meet the high volume of claims in the system (especially after passage of the recent PACT Act).

Here are some signs your VA C&P Exam went well:

1. Your entire claims file was available for the exam.

Your claims file (aka C-File) is a large record containing all the claims you've made, service treatment records (STR's), military records, civilian medical records and all the decisions that have been made in the past for your claims.

If that sounds like a lot of paperwork, it is. Almost all C-Files I encounter have 3,000 – 12,000 pages, which brings me to my next point...



2. You directed the examiner to the relevant medical evidence.

A large part of your disability examiner's job is to comb the entire record searching for information relevant to your claim.

However, the C-File is basically just a giant, searchable PDF thousands of pages long, making it oftentimes difficult to review and find contextual information in handwritten documents and redundant text.

Doing anything to get on the examiner's good side helps, and one of the best ways to do this is to save them some work.

Before your visit, prepare by going through your records, finding all the documents relevant to your claim, and bringing a hard copy of these in.

3. The VA ordered the right Disability Benefits Questionnaire for service connection for a specific diagnosis.

For the VA, almost all disabilities fall into distinct categories.

For example, there are many different types of knee issues you could be diagnosed with, but they all must be assessed using the Knee DBQ.

That may sound like a no-brainer, but as an examiner, *I often see the wrong assessment ordered.*

A common one I encounter is an Arthritis DBQ being ordered for arthritis in a specific joint.

This is problematic because the Arthritis DBQ is only intended for system-wide arthritic conditions.

This matters – since the DBQ's are filled with specific questions about your condition, **getting the wrong DBQ can lead to insufficient information for determining your VA disability rating.**



It's usually obvious which DBQ is the right one, so a good way to approach this is to simply ask your examiner what DBQ was ordered.

You can say something like, "I've heard the wrong DBQ sometimes gets ordered – can you clarify which one we have for my claim today?"

If you've received appointment paperwork prior to the visit, the DBQ's are often listed there as well. For a full list of downloadable DBQ's, visit our [DBQ resource center](#).

4. Your examiner took enough time to assess your disability.

Many of the veterans I've seen mention how previous C&P exams they've attended felt too short, with not too many questions asked about their condition and symptoms.

While some exams are indeed very short in nature, this is often a legitimate concern.

Consider the fact that during your examination, the doctor is expected to:

Conduct a thorough medical history



This includes onset of the condition, treatment you've received through the years, current symptoms related to your illness, specific examples of functional limitations caused by your condition and how your illness affects daily life, identifying any assistive devices you may be using, asking about recent medical testing, etc.

Review other conditions you have that are relevant.

Some conditions may be relevant to the one being claimed (especially if you're claiming [secondary service connection](#)).



Perform a focused, but thorough, physical exam.

If one is indicated for the condition (including the use of a goniometer anytime range of motion testing is required).

If you're filing for an increased rating, they should ask what's changed since the last time you filed.

As you can tell, there's a lot to cover even for just one claim.

Understanding this can help you get a feeling for whether or not the examiner progressed too rapidly, didn't ask enough questions, or skipped parts of the examination.

5. Your provider was specialized to administer your exam.

In some circumstances, you may encounter an examiner who doesn't have the right credentials to administer your C&P exam.

For example, you will need specialty providers for hearing loss, mental illness, or dental/vision issues – these cannot be performed by a general provider.

Most other claims can be seen by a general doctor, so don't be surprised if the examiner assigned to review your lower back injury isn't an orthopedic spine surgeon.

Can I challenge a bad C&P exam?

Yes! If you suspect your C&P exam was inappropriately performed for any of the above reasons, you may request another C&P exam from the VA.

Please note that you are not guaranteed to receive one, so it may help to write down a list of reasons why you believe your C&P exam was not performed appropriately or if it was performed by the wrong specialist.

How do I challenge a bad C&P exam and request a new one?

In order to report issues with the Compensation and Pension exam you've received and request a new one, document the reasons you think it went poorly in a formal Memorandum for Record (MFR).

Then, call the VA, use your MFR to guide your explanation of why you think a new exam is warranted, and then upload the MFR with the rest of your claim paperwork.

Private medical opinions can also help support your case. Keep in mind that the appeals process is also in place should you receive a claim denial letter. C&P exams are one of the critical pivot points when pursuing VA disability compensation and establishing a service connected disability for VA benefits, but it is also one that veterans tend to understand the least.

QUICK TIPS: C&P EXAM SUCCESS

- **Bring Key Documents:** Guide your examiner with relevant records.
- **Check Your DBQ:** Confirm the right questionnaire is used.
- **Ensure Thoroughness:** Your exam should cover history and symptoms.

Document issues if your exam falls short and contact the VA.

7 things you should bring to a C&P exam

BY NATHAN COSTUIC,
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If you were to ask the VA, they would tell you that you don't need to bring anything to a VA disability exam (also known as a Compensation and Pension – or C&P – exam).

While it is technically true that showing up empty-handed won't impact your VA disability claims from moving forward in the system, it doesn't mean that you'll be best prepared to fight for your case. At Hill and Ponton, we want to arm you with everything you could possibly need to be successful in establishing a service connected disability.



I've been a C&P examiner for the past several years, and I have seen too many patients show up missing the critical info that would make supporting their claim much easier. Before we get to the actual list, it might help to look at all of this from a specific angle, which is to...

CONSIDER THE VA DISABILITY CLAIM FROM THE EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE!

When you are being interviewed by a C&P doctor, they are focused on two categories of information: subjective and objective.

1. **Subjective information** includes your symptoms, description of your condition, and the impact it has on your life.
2. **Objective information** has more to do with things you can directly measure free from bias, like a blood pressure, your lumbar range of motion, or renal function on recent diagnostic labs. The VA requests as much objective information as possible in an exam report.



Subjective information is important since it helps the doctor understand the overall narrative regarding your disability, but most claims cannot stand on subjective data alone.

So when your examiner is able to see objective measures relevant to your disability, this goes a long way in propping up the necessary medical evidence.

With this in mind, you'll begin to see why bringing the following items to your VA claim exam can help:

1. Relevant Medical Records

“Bring medical records to an exam? Why? I submitted all of those already!”

The VA's official guidance on this topic is that all of the medical records relevant to your disability should be submitted via one of several, formal channels (which should absolutely be done).

Because of this recommendation, they maintain that you don't need to bring any records in-person to your exam, since the doctor should have access (in the C-File) to everything you've submitted.

In an ideal world, this would always work out. But consider for a moment how these records are processed – they may end up passing through multiple hands, softwares, and workflows to actually end up at your examiner's desk.

This takes time, and in some cases, the records you've submitted might not make it to the C-File in time for your exam.



Think about all the different clinics, hospitals, or centers where you've been treated for your disability and compile a hard-copy folder of all the relevant records to bring with you to your exam.

2. Hand-Selected Service Treatment Records

Service Treatment Records are documents that show everything you were treated for while you were in military service. Unfortunately, there tend to be a few problems with these records:

1. Many of these records (especially the older ones) are handwritten and can be difficult to read through.
2. Many of these records can be quite old and deteriorated, further making it difficult to understand them.

Your examiner typically looks through documents by using a search function.

As you can imagine, the reasons above make it impossible to use that feature, which leads to sometimes having to comb through hundreds (sometimes thousands...!) of pages manually.

You obviously may be more motivated to find this information than they are, so to mitigate these difficulties, you can obtain a copy of your military records and comb through them yourself. **Highlight any information that is relevant to your disability** and have it on hand to show your examiner during your exam.

3. A Current Medication List

You'd be correct for thinking that your most current list of medications should be listed in your claim file (aka C-File).

However, it may help to know that the C-File is a compilation of records that cuts off after a certain date.





Because of this, if your last documented appointment was a year ago (with current medications documented at that time), that list may no longer be up to date or accurate.

Often, patients with multiple illnesses aren't fully aware of the finer details related to their diagnoses.

However, the specifics of these your medical condition really matter for establishing VA benefits, and considering the fact that your examiner is applying forensic skills to dive into your case, seeing your medication list can really help them understand the full scope of what disabilities you suffer from.

Here's some examples of how they do this:

- You may know that you have some level of cardiac disease, but if you're currently on a beta blocker, your examiner might suspect ischemic heart disease.
- If you're on a blood thinner, they may suspect a history of atrial fibrillation.
- If you're taking several, specific drugs used in a certain combination, your examiner might look for further information on whether or not you have heart failure.

4. Claim- Relevant Forms

This is usually the exception rather than the rule, but sometimes the VA requests specific forms to complete your exam.

One common example is a hypertension log, which is used to document your blood pressure over several days. Specifically, the VA is looking for hypertension readings taken twice a day on three different days.

Another example that is not required, but tends to be helpful is a Disability Benefits Questionnaire completed by your physician, which is the same exam report that is going to be completed by your examiner.

5. Your Assistive Devices

Assistive devices are another important objective piece of evidence. Whether they are prescribed or over-the-counter, these devices will help your examiner more accurately understand the nature and extent of your VA disability claim.



Not only that, but it may help your examiner uncover important collateral information. For example, the presence of a knee brace may help the examiner document on instability, which is an important variable that has an impact on your rating.

Further, if your assistive device is critical for everyday movement, you may not be able to complete the C&P exam without it! For example, if you can't hear without your hearing aids, be sure to bring them with you.

6. Research Articles Supporting your Nexus

Sometimes, the connection between your disability claims and service is more subtle than might immediately be evident to your examiner. This is best described through a few examples:

- **Sleep Apnea and PTSD:** Many examiners might quickly dismiss this secondary relationship, reasoning that obstructive sleep apnea is an airway problem without a psychogenic origin. However, you may be able to show that PTSD caused you to gain weight, which served as an “intermediate step” in your development of sleep apnea.
- **Joint Arthritis and GERD:** Again, the relationship between arthritis in one of your joints and the GERD you suffer from may not be immediately apparent. However, patients with arthritis sometimes take large amounts of over-the-counter pain relief pills like anti-inflammatories to control their pain, which are known to cause alterations in stomach lining and can cause things like ulcers.

Finding research articles that help support these relationships may help sway your provider’s opinion, especially when it comes to secondary relationships that may be more subtle or indirect.

7. A Spouse, Partner, or Close Family Member

Bringing someone who is close to you (typically a family member) to your disability examination can help you fill in details as you’re being interviewed that you may miss along the way.

The information they give during your interview will also be considered subjective, but it certainly helps to have multiple people confirming the status of your disability claim and its impact on your everyday life. Layman evidence like this is required to be considered by your examiner as a part of their overall deliberation for your claim exam.

Checklist: 7 Essentials to Bring to Your C&P Exam

- ☐ **Relevant Medical Records:** hard copies for examiner review
- ☐ **Service Treatment Records:** highlight relevant parts.
- ☐ **Current Medication List:** ensure accuracy and updates.
- ☐ **Claim- Relevant Forms:** any specific requested documentation
- ☐ **Assistive Devices:** braces, hearing aids, etc.
- ☐ **Supporting Research:** studies backing your claim.
- ☐ **A Companion:** someone who can offer supporting details.

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