



FOIA Quick-Start Checklist

Your first Freedom of Information Act request in 15 minutes

Before You Write

- ☐ **Identify the right agency** — Which federal agency has the records you want?
 - ☐ **Check the reading room first** — Many records already released at foia.gov
 - ☐ **Define your date range** — Always include start and end dates
 - ☐ **Find the FOIA submission portal** — Most agencies accept requests at foia.gov or their own portal
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Writing Your Request

- ☐ **State it's a FOIA request** — Put "FOIA Request" in subject line and first sentence
 - ☐ **Describe records specifically** — "All emails from John Smith containing 'Project X' from Jan-Dec 2024"
 - ☐ **Request electronic format** — "Please provide records in native electronic format"
 - ☐ **Include your contact info** — Name, email, phone, mailing address
 - ☐ **State your fee category** — News media, educational, commercial, or other
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Magic Phrases That Work

- ☐ "All records, including but not limited to..."
 - ☐ "Including draft and final versions..."
 - ☐ "Please search all locations where responsive records may be stored..."
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- ☐ "Including personal devices and accounts used for government business..."

 **Pro Tip:** Most denials happen because requests are too vague. Be specific about WHAT you want, WHO created it, and WHEN it was created.

Mini Template

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

I request copies of [SPECIFIC RECORDS] created between [START DATE] and [END DATE].

Please provide records in electronic format via email.

Fee Category: [NEWS MEDIA / EDUCATIONAL / OTHER]

Contact: [YOUR NAME, EMAIL, PHONE]

Thank you.

After You Submit

- ☐ **Save your confirmation** — Keep the tracking number
- ☐ **Note the 20-day deadline** — Agency should respond within 20 business days
- ☐ **Prepare to appeal** — If denied, you have 90 days to appeal (and you should!)

Want the Full Playbook?

This checklist covers the basics. The complete **FOIA Request Mastery** guide (50+ pages) includes agency-specific strategies, appeal templates, fee waiver language, and advanced techniques.

[Get the full guide → jimmytools.net](https://jimmytools.net)

