

# Exam Guide - Effective Communication Strategies

## 1. Start Strong: Connect Your Condition to Service

- **First thing you say:**

*"I'm here for [condition] caused by my time in service. For example, [brief explanation]."*

- *Example:*

- *"My back pain started during heavy lifting drills in the Marines."*
- *"My PTSD comes from combat in Afghanistan."*

## 2. Be Clear & Consistent

- Stick to the facts:
  - *"This began/worsened in service because of [specific event or exposure]."*
- Don't guess or add extra details—just keep it simple.

## 3. The Exam Starts Early

- From the moment you arrive (even in the parking lot or virtual waiting room):
  - Stay focused.
  - Avoid phones, side conversations, or distractions.

## 4. Describe Your Worst Days

- Explain how bad it gets:
  - *"On my worst days, I can't [basic activity] because of [service-related condition]."*
  - *Example:*
    - *"My knee injury from airborne training makes it hard to stand for long."*
- Never say *"I'm fine"*—VA rates based on your worst symptoms.

## 5. Keep Answers Short & to the Point

- **Bad:** *"I've had back pain forever, maybe from sports or something..."*
- **Good:** *"My back pain started in service during ruck marches."*

## 6. Show How It Affects Your Life

- Explain real struggles:
  - *"I can't play with my kids because of my service-related back injury."*
  - *"My PTSD makes me avoid crowds, so I skip family events."*

## 7. Stay Professional (But Show Emotion If Needed)

- If asked *"How are you?"* → *"Managing my service-related pain day by day."*
- It's okay to show frustration/sadness when talking about limitations.

## 8. Mention Recent Treatment

- *"I saw Dr. Smith last month for my service-connected tinnitus."*

## 9. If Asked About Gaps in Treatment

- *"I didn't realize this was service-related until recently."*

## 10. Avoid These Mistakes

- ✗ Don't talk about injuries before service.
- ✗ Don't downplay symptoms (*"It's not that bad"*).
- ✗ Don't guess—stick to what you know.

**Goal:** Make sure the examiner understands **your condition is directly tied to service.**