

Pre-Orientation Guide and Advice for Entering Chap 31, Voc Rehab

1 INTRODUCTION TO VOC REHAB

Chapter 31, Vocational Rehab is a program under the Veteran's Affairs. Most of us are familiar with the Educational Program, which is Chapter 33, the GI Bill. In the guide, we will discuss the basics of Chap 31, how it differs from the GI Bill, how to apply, qualify, and eventually get entitled. We will also go over the things you can do to prepare for your Orientation Meeting, as this will assist you in presenting your occupational goal to your VRC.

****Disclaimer-** This guide is meant to assist those looking to enter the program, and will not cover much on the appeal side. If you are looking to make an appeal with the VA, we recommend that you look for a Veteran Service Officer, in your area, who can assist with your specific case. If you have general questions about the process, or want to know about other Veterans experiences, you can ask the Chap 31 Discussion Group, or search cases at the Veteran Board of Appeals page, located at:

<http://www.bva.va.gov/> ***

Also, keep in mind that the majority of the material that we present here, is from the regulating manual for Chap 31, which is the 38 CFR Part 21 <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/38/part-21>, and the M28R for Vocational Rehab, which can be found <http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/M28R.asp>. The other information given is from personal experience, from Veteran's going through the program. As a group, the Chapter 31 Discussion page, does not represent the VA in any form, but as Veteran's assisting other Veteran's navigate a program, that can seem difficult, at times.

What is Vocational Rehab and why was it created?

To understand why Vocational Rehab was created, we will go over a brief **history** of the program. If you want to skim over this, look for the next bold title, where we discuss the VA program specifically.

The Public Rehabilitation Program in America can trace its roots back to World War I. During that war, modern medicine allowed more injured soldiers to survive and come home with significant disabilities than ever before. But they couldn't go back to their old jobs.

The Soldiers Rehabilitation Act of 1918 introduced a new concept in disability support - not just money to live on, but training for the injured veterans as preparation for new jobs matching their "new" abilities. A farmer who lost a leg fighting in France might be trained in drafting. A factory worker with lungs burned by chlorine gas might become a pharmacist. This idea was popular with the American people and matched programs in several states for training injured workers. In 1920 Congress expanded the veteran's program to include anyone with a physical disability, not just veterans. This was the beginning of the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, or VR. The new program was great - as long

as your physical disability met the requirements and as long as you needed the limited VR services the system offered.

These gentlemen, for instance, are learning to weave wicker backs and seats for chairs.

These men are making rugs. But if you had some other kind of disability that didn't meet the requirements - such as seizures or mental retardation - you weren't eligible for any help.

People with these disorders continued to live on charity from family, church groups, or strangers - or in a state-supported institution. World War Two expanded the rehabilitation system even more.

When millions of soldiers went off to war, they left behind jobs that still needed to be done.

So millions of women went to work to help out, but many unskilled jobs were still empty.

To help fill those jobs, some amendments to the Rehab Act in 1943 expanded VR services to include people with mental illness and mental retardation.

This gradually doubled the number of people finding jobs through VR. And those new workers began changing society's stereotypes about what people with disabilities could do. In response to comments from the public, these amendments also changed the kinds of services that VR provided. In addition to training and guidance, VR began paying to correct certain disabilities, including cataract surgery on eyes or bone surgery for limb deformities. VR also began paying for equipment like hearing aids or wheelchairs - anything that improved the ability of someone with a disability to find a job. The 1943 amendments also allowed states to create separate VR agencies for people with blindness, if the states chose to.

In the decades that followed, as the economy grew and as doctors learned how to treat more serious disabilities, the process of VR became more complicated. Beginning with the 1954 amendments to the Act, the federal government started funding scientific research into disabilities and rehabilitation, eventually leading to the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, or NIDRR. These amendments also significantly increased funding for the public rehabilitation system to match its growing popularity.

Then came the 1965 amendments. President Johnson used these to recruit VR into his Great Society program. VR had been so successful finding jobs for people in need, so to speak, that the administration was going to expand its role. Suddenly the term Disability included drug abuse, alcoholism, repeated jail sentences, so-called Behavior Disorders, public assistance, and many other conditions that were not medical at all. In short, almost anyone who couldn't get a job could get help from VR.

In 1973 Congress responded with a completely new Rehab Act. This act directed VR to primarily serve people with significant physical or mental disabilities. In addition, counselors and consumers would now work in close partnership to individualize services. And each counselor-consumer team would use a formal Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program to help them develop and carry out those services.

Since 1986, VR has continued working closely with the disability community and has integrated emerging concepts into its regulations and services.

In 1992, new amendments to the Rehab Act created a new front section that spelled out some of these concepts in a statement of definitions and principles.

These amendments also created the State Rehabilitation Councils - which are citizens' advisory councils in each state to increase the voice of consumers in the policy and operations of state agencies.

In addition, the 1992 amendments increased the role of the consumer in planning his or her services, mandated a set of standards and indicators for monitoring agencies, required agencies to set minimum training standards for all VR counselors, and speeded up the eligibility process.

What is Chapter 31, Vocational Rehab administered under the VA?

The VA defines it as:

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program has two key goals. First, to assist the service-disabled veteran to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment. Second, for those persons who are severely disabled and that gainful employment is not an option, assistance may be provided to allow that person to live more independently in his or her community.

More importantly, Chap 31, is an **employment** program. Many people who are new to this information tend to jumble it up with the GI Bill, which is an **educational** program. Later, we will discuss why the two programs are not the same.

There are two steps to obtaining Chap 31 services under the VA. First you must check to see if you can apply for the program, as not all Veterans will qualify. ****Note – the VA has set the entitlements to Honorable or Other than Honorable Discharges****

Here are the basic qualifiers: Taken from the M28R, Part IV, Section A, Chapter 3.

3.04 Basic Entitlement to Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits and Services

Once a Veteran or a Servicemember is granted his/her service-connected disability rating, he/she must meet specific criteria for entitlement under one of the following conditions:

a. **20 Percent or more Service-Connected Disability (SCD) Rating** The Veteran must be granted a service-connected disability or combined service-connected disability rated **20 percent or more**, and: 1. Must **incur or aggravate a disability** in active military service on or after September 16, 1940 and, 2. Must be determined by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) to be in need of rehabilitation because of an EH. *(Employment Handicap. -We will define this at the end of the MR section)*

b. **10 Percent SCD Rating:** The Veteran must be granted a service-connected disability or combined service-connected disability rated 10 percent, and: 1. Must have **incurred or aggravated** the disability(ies) in active military service on or after September 16, 1940 and, 2. Must have been determined by a VRC to be in need of vocational rehabilitation services because of **an SEH**. *(Severe Employment Handicap – We will define this at the end of the MR section)*

c. **Memorandum Rating A:** Servicemember who is awaiting discharge **form active military service, is hospitalized, or receiving outpatient medical care, services or treatment for a disability**, and: 1. Has been granted a **temporary SCD or combined SCD rating** with: • **At least 10 percent compensable and he/she originally applied for Chapter 31 benefits after March 31, 1981** and before November 1, 1990 or, • **At least 20 percent compensable and he/she originally applied for Chapter 31 benefits after November 1, 1990** and, 3-2 M28R, Part IV, Section A, Chapter 3 Revised March 31, 2014 2. Has been determined by a VRC to be in need of rehabilitation because he/she meets the criteria for an EH. d. **Basic Eligibility and Entitlement for Severely Injured or Ill Servicemembers Pub. L. 110-181 was enacted to provide automatic entitlement for Chapter 31 benefits to Servicemembers who are awaiting discharge due to a medical condition resulting from a serious injury or illness that occurred during active duty. Basic eligibility is based on documentation from military service and not based on**

the establishment of a VA disability rating or Memorandum Rating. This entitlement is established without meeting the requirement for the existence of an EH.

What is a EH (Employment Handicap) and a SEH (Severe Employment Handicap)?

Employment handicap (EH)

An impairment of a Veteran or Servicemember's ability to prepare for, obtain, or retain employment consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests. For Veterans within the 12-year basic period of eligibility and rated at 20 percent or more, a finding of employment handicap results in entitlement to VR&E services.

Serious employment handicap (SEH)

A significant impairment of a Veteran or Servicemember's ability to prepare for, obtain, or retain employment consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests. The SEH must result in substantial part from a service-connected disability. For Veterans rated at 10 percent and Veterans beyond their 12-year basic period of eligibility, the finding of a SEH is necessary to establish entitlement to VR&E services.

How are they determined?

An **employment handicap (EH)** will be found to exist only if the VRC (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor) determines that the individual meets each of the following conditions:

(a) Vocational impairment. The individual has a vocational impairment; that is, an impairment of the ability to prepare for, obtain, or keep employment in an occupation consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests.

(b) Effects of impairment not overcome. The individual has not overcome the effects of the individual's impairment of employability through employment in, or qualifying for employment in, an occupation consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests. This situation includes an individual who qualifies for a suitable job, but who does not obtain or keep the job for reasons beyond his or her control.

(c) Contribution of the service-connected disability(ies) to the individual's overall vocational impairment.

(1) Except as provided in [paragraph \(c\)\(3\)](#) of this section, the service-connected disability(ies) must contribute in substantial part to the individual's overall vocational impairment. This means that the

disability(ies) must have an identifiable, measurable, or observable causative effect on the overall vocational impairment, but need not be the sole or primary cause of the employment handicap.

(a) Requirements for determining serious employment handicap. For each individual who is found to have an employment handicap, a VRC (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor) must make a separate determination of whether the individual has a serious employment handicap. The VRC determines that the individual meets each of the following conditions:

(1) Significant vocational impairment. The individual has a significant vocational impairment; that is, a significant impairment of the ability to prepare for, obtain, or keep employment in an occupation consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests, considering the factors described in § 21.50 and [paragraph \(b\)](#) of this section.

(2) Effects of significant impairment not overcome. The individual has not overcome the effects of the significant vocational impairment through employment in, or qualifying for employment in, an occupation consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests. This includes an individual who qualifies for a suitable job, but who does not obtain or keep the job for reasons beyond his or her control.

(3) Contribution of the service-connected disability(ies) to the individual's overall significant vocational impairment.

(b) Factors for assessment during the initial evaluation, when determining whether a significant vocational impairment exists. The combination of all restrictions and their effects on the individual define the extent of the vocational impairment and its significance. When determining whether the individual has a significant vocational impairment, VA will develop and assess the following factors and their effects:

(1) Number of disabling conditions;

(2) Severity of disabling condition(s);

(3) Existence of neuropsychiatric condition(s);

(4) Adequacy of education or training for suitable employment;

(5) Number, length, and frequency of periods of unemployment or underemployment;

(6) A pattern of reliance on government support programs, such as welfare, service-connected disability compensation, nonservice-connected disability pension, worker's compensation, or Social Security disability;

(7) Extent and complexity of services and assistance the individual needs to achieve rehabilitation;

(8) Negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities and other evidence of restrictions on suitable employment, such as labor market conditions; discrimination based on age, race, gender, disability or other factors; alcoholism or other substance abuse; and

(9) Other factors that relate to preparing for, obtaining, or keeping employment consistent with the individual's abilities, aptitudes, and interests.

What does this mean for me?

This information comes in handy when you are presenting your case to your VRC. It could mean the difference between a Jr. College or getting a Doctorates. Having an SEH, will allow you more time to be in the program. If you can show with documentation on how your disabilities have affected your employability, then you could be on your way to retraining in a new field! Start thinking of how you may have been discriminated against in the work place, due to your disabilities, or how you used to be able to do a job performance item, and it has lessened due to a disability you gained from being in the Service.

What are some examples of this?

Case 1- Joe went into the military as a Military Police Officer. Once he left the service, he decided to get a job with his local police force. As time passed, he starts to notice that being on patrol, aggravates his SCD (service connected disability) knee arthritis, and he is not performing as well as he used to. He begins to call in sick every now in then, because of the pain, and he is passed for over for promotion. Joe realizes his knee will not get any better, and he wants to pursue being a forensic investigator, since he wouldn't be required to restrain people, or run after them.

Case 2- Sally served proudly for many years in the Military, and went to school to be a nurse. As she studied, while in the military, she deployed twice. In those deployments, she worked in the ER, and was constantly around trauma. Sally was diagnosed with PTSD, and being around trauma, or patients causes her additional anxiety, and flashbacks constantly. She wants to stay in healthcare, because she is passionate about helping people, so she decides to use Chap 31 as a way to become an administrator, in the hospital.

As you can see, in each example, the Veteran is looking to re-train in a new line of work, so that they won't aggravate their SCD's any longer. Each case is very independent, and the VRC will look at every piece of the evidence presented, to see if an EH or SEH is appropriate. Also, this determination could be changed as you are in the program, so just because you start out as an EH, it could potentially change into an SEH later.

I meet basic entitlement to Chap 31, based on the requirements above. What now?

First and Foremost—Yay!! This is exciting. Chap 31 is a great program, and you are about to apply for it. The easiest way to apply for this is through EBenefits', which is everyone's favorite website. :P

Go to: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>

Log in, with your DS Username, or CAC card.

Once logged in, click Apply at the top Left.



eBenefits
My Gateway to Benefit Information

A Service of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense

Apply | Manage | Learn | National Resource Directory | Employment Center | Contact

Compensation
Pension
Housing
Education and Training
Health Care
Insurance
Burial

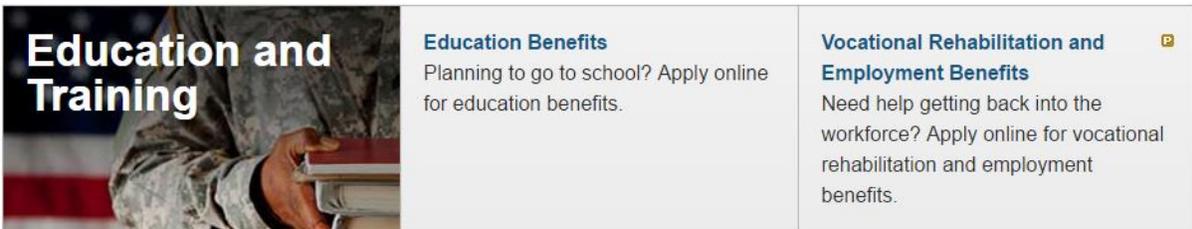
Featured Activities

Apply for disability compensation Submit a claim for disabilities that you believe are related to your military service.

Apply for VA Health Care Submit your Application for Health Benefits. This helps us determine your eligibility.

Dependents | Personal Information: | Popular Items:

Then Click on Education and Training.



Education and Training

Education Benefits
Planning to go to school? Apply online for education benefits.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits
Need help getting back into the workforce? Apply online for vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits.

After you have clicked the Education Screen, you should see something like this:

You only need to apply once for either one of the VR&E programs below. You will be contacted directly by VR&E soon after we receive your request.

<p>Education and Career Counseling</p> <p>VA's Education and Career Counseling program is a great opportunity for Service members and Veterans to get personalized counseling and support to help guide your career paths. Service members are eligible to enroll in Education and Career Counseling if you are a Service member within 180 days of anticipated discharge from active duty or if eligible for Chapter 33 benefits while on active duty. Veterans are eligible to enroll within one year from the date of discharge or release from active duty, if you are participating in an education benefit.</p> <p>Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Career Choice - evaluation to understand the best career options for you based on your interests and capabilities.• Benefits Coaching - guidance on the effective use of your VA benefits and/or other resources to achieve your education and career goals.• Personalized Support - Academic or adjustment counseling and personalized support to help you remove any barriers to your success. <p>Request Counseling</p>	OR	<p>Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program</p> <p>If eligible and entitled, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program can help Veterans with service-connected disabilities find meaningful, sustainable careers and connect you with training or other opportunities to help you reach your employment goals. Here are some ways VR&E can help you succeed in your career:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine your transferable skills, aptitudes, and interests.• Identify your viable employment and/or independent living services options.• Explore labor market and wage information in your area.• Identify physical demands and other characteristics of jobs you're seeking.• Narrow vocational options to identify your suitable employment goals.• Select a VR&E program track leading to your employment or independent living goal.• Investigate your training requirements.• Identify resources needed to achieve your rehabilitation.• Develop an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan to achieve your identified employment and/or independent living goals. <p>Learn More</p> <p>Apply for Chapter 31</p>
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****Note—Ignore the date that is listed on this page. Many of you will want to make some sense of it, but it really is irrelevant to applying. It will be updated once you are approved, in the program. ****

Click on Apply to Chapter 31, even if you just want the Counseling Services. The application will probably take about 15 to 45 mins, depending if you already had your information saved from doing the GI Bill. You will want to go through and answer each question thoroughly, because the VRC can make a determination from what you put on the application. If you don't know the career field you want now, put a general idea. You can always change that later with your VRC.

Personal Advice ****Once you have submitted it, go back into VONAPP and check to see that it has the date you submitted it. If a date is missing, you need to go back into the application to resubmit it. This has cause Vets some additional wait time, because they thought they submitted it, and did not check.****

I made it through the application, and submitted it. Now what?

Awesome. Now comes the super fun part of “Hurry Up and Wait.” Your application gets sent to your local VRC office, where they will assign you an Orientation Date to attend. Every VA office has a different system, and a different wait time for doing this. The average times are between 2 weeks and 1.5 months. Once they assign you a date to come in, they will send you a letter package in the mail, that tells you what to bring in that day. If you cannot make the orientation date, be sure to call the number listed and reschedule.

The packet will have an additional information sheet for you to fill out. I recommend doing this.

Tell me about Orientation:

The most important thing to know about Orientation, is that it lasts several hours. The usual time length is between 3-5 hours, depending on how many Veterans they are seeing that day. It is not recommended to have kids with you, as they will probably get pretty bored with the wait time. Care providers and Spouses should be okay, as long as there is enough seating to go around.

Make sure you bring your paperwork with you that was sent in the mail. Most of the people did not have it pre-filled at my appointment, and this caused them to be there later than the average time. The people who had the information filled out, were seen first by VRC's.

After they collect the mail packets, they will show you an informational video to the group.

From there, they will administer tests to show your aptitude, abilities and interests.

Why do Aptitude, Abilities, and Interests, matter?

Essentially, your VRC has to vouch for every Veteran he or she, approves for the program. That includes your progress and the goal that they approve. Every Veteran has a different strength, or ability, that they can achieve. They test these things to make sure that you are going to be successful, not only in the program, but keeping the employability, that the VA is investing in. While people get into career goals, and realize that they would not flourish in them, changing plans can be a hassle to Veterans, and costly for the VA. The tests reduce the risk of this happening. It is important to know that if you absolutely hate doing paperwork, to pay attention to the interests test where it speaks about administrative items. You don't want to score exceptionally high on things, because they don't seem to bother you much, but you would hate a career in it.

If you struggle with math, but want to get a career goal in engineering, computers, or science, it is advisable that you look over fractions, pre-algebra, decimals and elementary math skills. These will be tested on.

Also, word recognition and association is on the test. Looking up practice SAT tests for examples is a good way to prepare for this.

Your VRC will use these tests to see if you have the ability to complete your education goals.

Orientation continued:

After you take your tests, turn in your paperwork, you will meet with your assigned VRC, who will determine if you are entitled to the program and eventually your career goal. Most of the VRC's will send you home with "Homework" to do. However, if you do the homework before Orientation, and there isn't any work left to do, it is very possible that they will complete your career goal at the first appointment. Usually, expect 3-4 meetings to get a contract signed for a career goal, especially if you wait to see what the VRC will ask you to complete as homework.

****Note about Orientations and VRC's—Keep in mind that these Counselors are humans, who have families and get sick from time to time. It is possible to attend an Orientation, without meeting with a VRC, due to them being out of the office. Rest assured that the packets you turn in, with the application, and tests, can get you the entitlement determination, without them ever speaking to you. If found entitled, they will send you a letter in the mail, along with the next scheduled time to meet with your VRC****

How can I go in prepared with my homework?

Every VRC will have different requirement for what they ask for. However, this is a pretty good way to get all your ducks in a row, so that the majority of the work can be completed in the "hurry up and wait" period.

I recommend that you get a 3 ring binder, to keep all your correspondence and letters in, because they will eventually ask to see those. Also, tabs (post it stickers) will make the sections easier to locate, when handing items to the VRC.

Front section- Letters, Correspondence and VA information

Tab 1- Personal Summary and Application Letter

Tab 2- Road to Success

Tab 3- Career Scope

Tab 4- Career Scope Summary

Tab 5- My Next Move & O*net

Tab 6,7,8- Your 3 Career Choices

Tab 9 (optional) Your Current Career

Tab 10- Interviews in your chosen Career Goal

Tab 11- School(s) Information to include- Degree plan, Application for Admission, Student Schedule, if you registered for classes, Transcripts and Accreditation Information

Tab 12- Job Postings for your Chosen Career Field, in your area

Tab 13- Previous Job Documentation

I will go into each of these and break them down:

Front Section: I like to keep any and all correspondence from my VRC in this section, because it is the easiest to find. I print emails, appointment letters, approvals and denials, and my career goal contract. Also, if you have any GI Bill months left, print out the eligibility from benefits to give to your VRC for the higher stipend rate. (E5, with dependents BAH rate)

Tab 1 – Personal Summary and Application Letter: Your personal summary page should include some about who you are, what you did in the military, your background, and explain any previous school difficulties that you had before.

I will post an example of the application letter, omitting some of my personal information out of it.

March 8, 2016

Re: Application for Chapter 31 Benefits

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is to express my interest in retraining, to gain entry level employment, as a Licensed Occupational Therapist.

My service connected disabilities of PTSD (30%) and left foot joint fusion (10%) has affected the previous positions I held, in administrative work. I have lost jobs due to my PTSD symptoms, and been asked to leave professional settings, ***** Due to this, I have not been able to retain administrative positions for more than a year at a time. I have no interest in being an administrative assistant, executive assistant, or office manager, since it is lacking the team effort that I loved in health care, and the military.

In the military, I received training as a Healthcare Specialist. While the work was fulfilling, and I enjoyed it, I let my certification lapse, which makes me unemployable as a EMT.

Use this space to speak about your past educational experiences. Be sure to explain any difficulties you faced, and how you will overcome them with Chap 31.

In addition to being an Licensed OT, I have researched two other entry level career choices of becoming an Audiologist, or a Registered Nurse. I have a passion for wanting to work in pediatrics, as that was my favorite assignment when I was a Healthcare Specialist in the Army. While all the careers options are interesting, I believe that becoming an OT is really where my heart is.

I would like a career goal of "Licensed Occupational Therapist" with my IWRP. I have done some research into retraining to gain entry level employment as a licensed OT, through the Dept of Labor, O*NET, US Money & News, and My Next Move. Employment as an OT is forecasted as a "Bright Outlook" with a steady increase rise in jobs. (27 percent) Also, the unemployment rate is 1.1, which is lower than Admin positions by almost 3 percent, nationwide.

Being a Healthcare Specialist has proven that I have the aptitude and abilities to succeed in OT, because I have already learned the most important elements of patient care, bedside manner, and problem solving on the fly. My classes in Sociology, which is the recommended path by the OT Accreditation, AOTA, have been good grades. My every intention is to the best I can, so I can remain competitive for entry into The University of St. Augustine's in Austin, to attend the OT program. The average cost of a

state school is about \$10,000 and if I attend consecutively, I can complete the bachelors in two year's time. My masters will take an additional 2 years, and is estimated to be \$13,000 a trimester, but this is an approved Yellow Ribbon university.

In conclusion, PTSD and the joint fusion, have prevented me from retaining employment working in the field I am currently in and qualified to work within. My education requires additional training, in an area of employment that fits my abilities, aptitudes and interests. Working as a licensed OT would not impact my disabilities, and allow me to gain employment to the maximum extent possible.

Thank you for your consideration,

****This is the place to really make your case.. but 1 page printed is recommended. Do not go overboard trying to convince your VRC that you should be accepted into the program.****

Tab 2- Road to Success: This is where you formulate your Career Goal on paper. Mine looked like this:

Road to Success:

- Finish Bachelors Degree at Texas State University, starting Summer of 2016
- Complete requirements by 2 years, take GRE and Graduate.
- Apply for admissions to the Graduate Program at the University of St. Augustine's in Austin, TX- OT Masters Program.
- Get Licensed by the State of Texas, in Occupational Therapy.

Tab 3- CareerScope: Your careerscope assessment will go here. This is just another interest test that the VRC uses to see if you are going into a field you are interested in.

<https://va.careerscope.net/gibill> Go here to complete the assessment.

Tab 4- CareerScope Summary- I separated these to make them easier to locate, as the assessment will have a lot of pages to it.

Tab 5- My next Move- My next Move is O*net's interest Profiler. Take it and print the results for your folder.

<https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip> Go here to complete the assessment.

Tab 6, 7, 8- O*net Information- You should be prepared to present 3 career choices as options to the VRC. Remember, they are educated, trained and specialize in matching people with careers. Don't be offended, if they recommend something else. Sometimes, they may just need a little more convincing that you can perform well in your choices.

When using O*net to research your choices, you want to choose occupations that have **bright** outlooks on them, because this shows the VRC that there will be job growth in those industries. For each career choice, you should be prepared to present how it would be achievable for you, school wise. However, if you have your heart set on one specific, I would focus on doing that choice. For me, I chose Occupational Therapy, Audiologist, and Nursing, in that specific order of interest. In order to be an OT or

and Audiologist, I would have to be approved for a Graduates Degree. OT would require less school than the others, due to me having more than half of my bachelors done. This was a strong selling point to the VRC.

Print out the O*net information for your 3 choices here: <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Tab 9-Optional Current Career- I had been working in admin jobs since I left the military. I used this tab to show that being in admin work had no future job growth in O*Net, to further strengthen my case. However, if you are currently in a position that has job growth, I recommend skipping this step.

Tab 10- School(s) Information- This is the tab where I kept all my information on the two schools that I wanted to attend. I printed out accreditation information, which came in handy for my contract, because my VRC had never heard of the school. You can also check WEAMS to verify that your school is VA Payable and Verified. <http://inquiry.vba.va.gov/weamspub/buildSearchInstitutionCriteria.do> If you can not locate your school in it, call the Veterans Affairs office at the school and ask how the code. My graduate school was missing a period in WEAMS, and my VRC almost denied it because he couldn't locate the school in the system.

Also, transcripts, admission to the school, and degree plans should go in here. I recommend applying during the wait time, so that you don't miss deadlines. You don't have to sign up for classes, which will result in charges, until you get approved for Chap 31. This is one less thing you have to wonder about, in the process, plus it can help convince the VRC that the college deems you worthy, so they should too.

If you have any pre-req's for a grad or phd program, make sure you have enough electives to cover this in your degree plan.

Tab 11- Interviews- Some VRC's will ask you to conduct interviews with people who are currently working in the field that you are interested in.

The examples that I saw asked these things:

1. How did you get started in this field?
2. What are your duties on a typical day?
3. What is the education or training requirements?
4. What are the challenges you face in your job?
5. What skills and abilities are needed to do this type of work?
6. What is the salary range for entry level positions?
7. Do you see a demand for this occupation or future changes taking place in this field?
8. Do you have any suggestions, recommendations, or advice to offer me concerning this occupation?

Tab 12- 5 Job postings in your area, for your career choice

Go to Indeed.com, Monster.com or Glassdoor.com, and print out 5 different job announcement for positions in your area, that show the education requirements, the skills needed and any additional licensures or qualifications needed.

It is really important that if you desire a certain level of training, that your postings all say this on them. Your VRC will take these from you, and add them to your file.

Tab 13- Previous Job Information and Documentation

As we discussed before, this program is really all about employability, and how they can assist with getting you job ready. You will want to take in your resume, and any other documentation that shows that you have been disciplined or counseled for job performance. If you were terminated, or have a letter of resignation, where you address your desire to leave for your disabilities, I would add them into this section. This is important, because it could mean the difference between an EH or an SEH.

How does the GI Bill differ from Chap 31? Which is better to use?

Again, the GI Bill is an educational benefit, and Chap 31 is designed to get you employable. While retraining (school) is one of the biggest components of program, there are 5 tracks that someone could potentially enter. GI Bill is really self-led, where you will not have counseling sessions to track your progress, or need permission to choose a career field. GI Bill is limited to 36 months of entitlement, and Chap 31 can be up to 48 months, without additional approvals. GI Bill gives you an annual allowance for books and supplies, which totals up to \$1000, and Chap 31 covers all books, and most of your supplies. Chap 31, will also provide you equipment needed to be successful, such as a laptop package, if you can show the need for one. EX— your kid uses the only laptop you have for homework, thus you can't use it to complete your work. Keep in mind that all requests for these go through your VRC and they approve it.

If you don't have the GI Bill or exhausted all your months, then you will receive the Chap 31 stipend. You can find the current rates here: http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/subsistence_allowance_rates.asp

Which one is better? Really it depends on your individual situation. Some people like that they have more independence under the GI Bill, and some people know that books usually total over \$1000 a year, and want it to be covered. Some people have used GI Bill to a certain point, and realize they simply can not finish a degree, due to transfers or running out of months. I will stress that if you present your case to be all about finishing school, your VRC will probably not like it. They want you to be seeing the end path, of the career and employability.

Why do people get denials into Chap 31?

To be honest, the most frequent way we see people get denied, when they are determined eligible with the requirements I listed above, are because they are already employed, and just looking to further a career. Unfortunately, that is not what the program is for. Does this mean that you have to be unemployed? No, not at all.. but to be approved, you should have something aggravating your disabilities, and thus you need to leave your current career field.

What is an example of this? Eric has a job as an adjunct professor at a university. He coaches one of the athletic teams, and this is how he was able to apply for the position. He currently has a masters and is looking to chap 31 to get a doctorates, so that he can apply for a tenure position at University. He meets with his VRC and is denied Chap 31.

What Eric doesn't realize is that his degree makes him employable in other field, or professions. Chap 31 is about getting basic employment entry, and not going just getting a better paycheck. Certain professions require basic entry levels to be doctorates, which could be medical doctor, physical therapy,

or psychologists. However, being in education, he is employed at the basic entry level, with his current degree.