



PRO SE / SELF-REPRESENTED GUIDE

Unemployment Appeal Exhibit Guide

A practical guide to organizing evidence for unemployment benefit denial appeals and telephone hearings.

Your unemployment claim was denied. You have a limited window to appeal — usually 10 to 30 days depending on your state. Under 42 U.S.C. section 503 and Social Security Act section 303(a)(1), you have the right to a fair hearing. Most unemployment hearings happen by phone, which means you need your documents organized and in front of you so you can reference them when the hearing officer asks questions. The employer will likely participate and may have their own evidence. This guide covers what to gather and how to organize it so you are ready.

Denial & Appeal Documents

- Determination letter**
The letter denying your benefits — it lists the reason code and appeal deadline
- Appeal form**
Your completed appeal form with a copy for your records
- Correspondence from the unemployment office**
Any letters, questionnaires, or requests for information you received
- Weekly certification records**
Proof that you filed weekly claims as required

Employment Records

- Employment contract or offer letter**
The terms of your employment including job title, start date, and salary
- Termination letter or separation notice**
The document explaining why your employment ended
- Performance reviews**
Positive reviews undermine "misconduct" claims — bring all of them
- Disciplinary records**
Any warnings or write-ups — know what the employer has before the hearing

Wage Documentation

- Pay stubs**
Recent pay stubs showing your wage rate and hours worked
- W-2 forms**
Tax documents confirming your employment and earnings
- Direct deposit records**
Bank statements showing payroll deposits with employer name visible

Company Policies

- Employee handbook**
The handbook in effect when you were employed — show the specific policy the employer claims you violated
- Attendance policy**
If the denial involves attendance, bring the written policy and your actual attendance records
- Progressive discipline policy**
If the employer did not follow their own discipline process, that helps your case

Communications & Evidence

- Emails about the separation**
Communications showing the circumstances around your departure
- Text messages with supervisor**
Screenshots with dates showing relevant conversations
- Witness contact information**
Names and numbers of coworkers who can corroborate your account
- Job search records**
Log of applications submitted — most states require active job searching

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. Missing the appeal deadline — usually 10 to 30 days from the date on the determination letter, not the date you received it
2. Not keeping copies of your own performance reviews and personnel records before you leave
3. Failing to bring the company handbook to the hearing to reference specific policies
4. Not preparing for the employer's cross-examination — they will ask pointed questions
5. Assuming "constructive discharge" is obvious — you need to document the intolerable conditions

ORGANIZATION TIPS

- Put the denial letter and appeal deadline on top — the hearing officer references these first
- Organize employment documents chronologically: offer letter, reviews, any discipline, termination
- Tab or flag the specific handbook section the employer claims you violated
- Print emails and texts with dates visible — do not read from your phone during a phone hearing
- Write a one-page summary timeline of your employment from start date through separation

COURTROOM PREPARATION

- Most hearings are by phone — have all documents numbered and spread in front of you
- Call from a quiet room with good reception. Background noise signals to the hearing officer that you are not taking it seriously.
- The employer bears the burden of proving misconduct for a termination. For a voluntary quit, you bear the burden of proving good cause.
- If you were fired, the key question is whether your actions were "misconduct" under state law — not just whether you made a mistake
- Prepare a 2-minute opening statement: who you are, how long you worked there, what happened, and why you deserve benefits
- Have your calendar open — the hearing officer may ask about specific dates
- If the employer says something false, stay calm. You will get your turn to respond.

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