

Answers to  
13 Common  
Questions About  
Completing Your



# Function Report



When claims are at the initial or reconsideration steps of the disability appeal process, the Social Security Administration (SSA) usually asks claimants to complete a Function Report – Adult. The Function Report questionnaire asks:

- How your medical condition limits your ability to work
- What you do during a typical day
- About specific daily activities
- About your ability to perform activities such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, etc.

Here are answers to questions claimants often have about completing the Function Report.

### 1. Will this booklet give me some stock paragraphs to insert into the Function Report so that I can be sure to win my case?

Absolutely not. The surest way to lose a case is for you to use stock paragraphs written by someone else. The best way to win a case is to write the absolute truth about your life, written in your own words.

### 2. I am not a very good writer. I can't even spell many words correctly. Shouldn't I get some help?

If you're capable of writing a letter that a family member can understand, you don't need help completing the questionnaire. If your answers on the Function Report are honest and genuine, that's more important

than any misspellings or grammatical errors. A Function Report obviously written by a claimant is often more powerful and convincing than a questionnaire completed by, for example, a claimant's lawyer.

### 3. But my handwriting is illegible. Should I have someone with better handwriting write down what I say?

Yes. If your handwriting is truly illegible, ask a friend with better handwriting to help you. It is important for your case that SSA decision makers are able to read what you write.

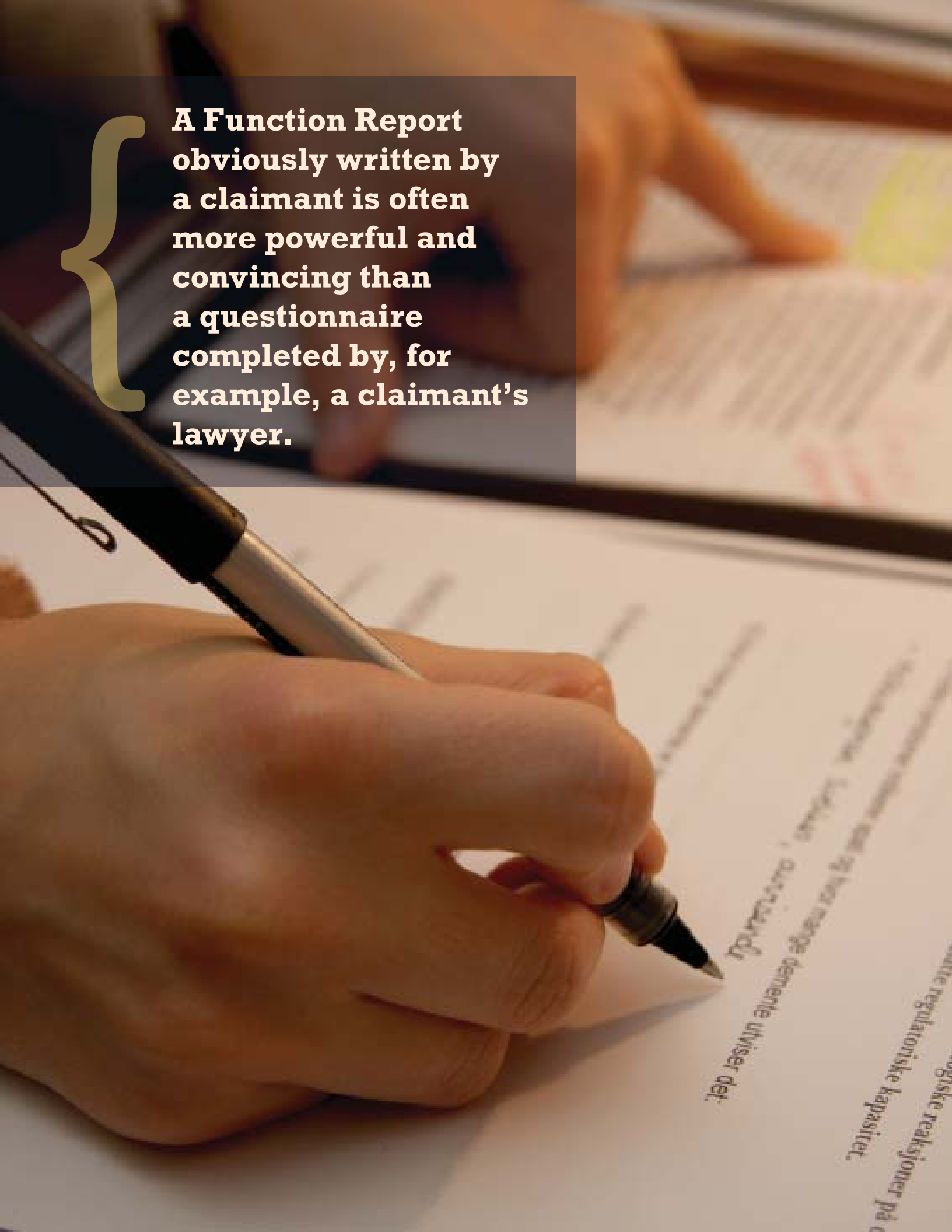
### 4. Do you have any general advice for completing the Function Report?

Tell the truth. Be sure the questionnaire describes not only your daily activities but also your limitations. Describe both without exaggerating and without minimizing. Details help someone who reads the Function Report understand what your life is like.

When you're done, ask a friend or relative to read the questionnaire and answer this question for you – *Have I given an accurate description of my limitations and my daily life?*



**The biggest mistake made by claimants in answering this question is failing to provide enough details.**

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a black pen and writing on a document. The document has some text, including the word "demente" and "regulatoriske". The background is blurred, showing another document with a yellow highlighter mark.

**A Function Report obviously written by a claimant is often more powerful and convincing than a questionnaire completed by, for example, a claimant's lawyer.**

## 5. Do you have any advice for answering this question on page 1: “How do your illnesses, injuries, or conditions limit your ability to work?”

This is a question you answered on a different SSA form, the Disability Report, a form usually completed around the time an application is filed.

Claimants usually do a pretty good job of answering this question. If you’re satisfied with what you said before, you can repeat it here, though you might want to consider adding more explanation – more details about how your medical condition limits your ability to work. The biggest mistake made by claimants in answering this question is failing to provide enough details.

Another mistake sometimes made by claimants when answering this question is that they explain only why they cannot do their former work. To win a disability case, you usually need to prove much more than inability to do your prior job. Many claimants, including almost everyone under age 50, must prove they cannot do a full time easy job.

## 6. Because it gives so little space at the top of page 2, question 6 makes it look like SSA wants me to describe in a few sentences what I do from the time I wake up until going to bed. Should I write only a few sentences?

No. You need to write as much as is necessary so that the reader will understand what your life is like. You can use the page 8 “Remarks” section to provide additional information, but even that isn’t very large. You may have to add a page.

It is important to take as much space as needed to give a good description of your daily activities; but at the same time, do not go on and on. Some people have been known to write a small pamphlet. While such pamphlets can provide valuable information, there is such a thing as overkill. And such pamphlets sometimes make SSA decision makers wonder how it is that someone who can write so much can be unable to work.

However, the mistake made by most people is writing too little.

The best approach is to answer question 6 after you’ve answered all the other questions on the Function Report. The questionnaire asks a lot of specific questions. If you describe something in answer to a specific question, you don’t need to repeat it when answering question 6. You can use question 6 to give an over view of what your life is like. But it might be a good idea to conclude your answer to question 6 with this: “See my answers to other questions.”



**7. But I don't really do anything during a typical day. I heat up food and wash a few dishes daily. I do a little cleaning once in a while. I do laundry and grocery shopping once a week. Is this what I should describe?**

Yes, but cooking, cleaning, laundry and shopping will be addressed in answers to specific questions on pages 3 and 4.

In answering question 6, it is important for you to describe "not really doing anything." That is, what are you doing in between such activities? How are you spending the majority of your time? Are you watching television? Are you reading? Are you looking out the window? It is also important to fully explain all of your "down time" -- the time you spend in bed, the recliner, on the sofa, in the bathroom, or taking daytime naps.

As for laundry, cleaning, etc., it is important to describe anything you do differently now. If you do things for only a few minutes at a time and then rest, be sure to explain that either in answer to question 6 or question 14.b.

Note that question 14.b. asks how much time house work takes you. Some disabled people have been known to honestly answer question 14.b. saying that housework takes them "all day." This is true because they do it only for a few minutes at a time

and then rest and keep going back to it all day. It takes all day to get a little housework done.

But SSA will likely conclude from such answers that these claimants spend the entire day doing housework without a break – they could work as house cleaners. Thus, a complete description of how housework gets done is important to keep SSA from getting the wrong impression.




**8. What do daily activities have to do with being disabled?**

Although there are some disabled people whose daily activities at home are completely normal (for example, those with certain mental impairments), most claimants have organized their home life to accommodate their disabilities. A description of how you organize your life around your disability can win your case.

For example, sometimes people with back impairments have to spend time lying down or sitting in a recliner. Some people get relief lying on the floor. Some people use a heating pad or ice. Some people do daily back exercises. This is important information.

If people with such impairments leave out a description of how they try to get relief from pain during the day, if they describe only the few activities they actually do (laundry, cleaning, shopping, etc.), they are missing an opportunity to provide information that might convince SSA decision makers that they cannot work a regular job.



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HEALTH

## 9. How much detail should I provide on page 6 in the “Information About Abilities” section of the Disability Report?

As much as possible. Use the Remarks section at the end of the questionnaire to provide details and, if necessary, add another page. Thoughtful, honest, realistic descriptions of how your medical condition affects your abilities can help win your case. Describe how long you can do various activities. Beware of underestimating or overestimating your capacity.

Although SSA does not say so, the relevant issue is this:

***What is your capacity for doing these activities in a normal work situation?*** For

example, let’s say you can walk one mile if you really push yourself but then you’d have to go home and lie down. Do you have the capacity to walk one mile in a normal work situation? No, you don’t. Walking one mile is over-doing it. Walking this far exceeds your normal work limitations. You need to keep this in mind when you estimate how far you can walk.

Estimates of sitting and standing should also be based on a normal work situation. Sitting tolerances should be estimated for sitting in a work chair, not a recliner. A better way to ask about sitting is: How long can you sit in a work chair in a normal work situation before you need to get up? Does standing and stretching for a minute or two take care of the problem? If so, describe what you need to do when you get up. Or do you need to walk around? If so, describe it. How long do you need to walk around? If you add together all your sitting time, what is the grand total number of hours out of an 8-hour working day that you can sit?



Standing tolerance should be estimated based on standing in a slow moving line or the way a worker moves around a little when standing at a machine in a factory. A worker doesn’t stand at attention like a soldier. Estimate standing at one time and also estimate the grand total number of hours out of an 8-hour working day that you can stand.

## 10. Should I give the lowest possible estimates for my capacity for sitting, standing and walking?

No. You should give the most accurate and honest estimates possible. If your tolerance for these activities varies from day

to day, state a range of minutes you can do an activity and estimate how often the shorter time applies and how often the longer time applies.

## 11. My problem comes and goes. Some days I can do most normal daily activities but other days I can hardly do anything.

Many claimants are disabled by such episodic impairments. It is important that you explain what happens on bad days and how often you have problems. Think back over the last month or the last year. Count how many bad days you have had. Estimate how many days per month are bad days -- so bad you would not be going to work (or would have to leave work early) even if you had a really easy job.

***It is important to give SSA a balanced picture of your life.*** If you describe only the bad days, it is likely SSA won't believe you. If you describe only the good days, you'll lose your case because SSA will conclude that you function normally.

## **12. I am disabled because of mental illness. Should I skip all the questions about physical limitations and doing things at home?**

No. Answer these questions honestly. If you have no limitation in a particular area, say so.

Check only the boxes in the "Information About Abilities" section on page 6 having to do with your limitations. This section offers several choices that may or may not apply to your situation: memory, completing tasks, concentration, understanding, following instructions, and getting along with others.

Sometimes it helps to discuss your limitations with a spouse or friend. When you describe your limitations, provide details and examples. ***Details and examples win cases.***

## **13. Why does SSA want to know about side effects of medications (page 8)?**

Sometimes the side effects of medications impose significant work restrictions. Thus, it is important to describe these side effects.

Sometimes when you are taking many medications, you and your doctor don't know exactly which medication is causing the side effect or if it is a combination of

medications that causes the side effect. It would be wise to explain this on the Function Report.

Note that SSA needs to know only about the side effects you are actually having from medications, not the possible ones listed by the drug manufacturers.

It is important that you have discussed any side effects with your doctor. Many people



assume that they have to put up with the side effects in order to get the therapeutic benefit of the drugs. And they don't describe side effects in any detail when their doctor asks. Unless your side effects are described in your medical records, SSA may not accept that you actually suffer the side effects even if they are listed by the drug manufacturer.

***Lastly, before you send your completed Function Report to SSA, make a copy for yourself.***