



TIPS FOR WRITING GRIEVANCES FOR INMATES IN WASHINGTON STATE PRISONS

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide provides information about the Grievance Program for individuals in the custody and under the supervision of the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC). It is intended to be a reference tool for writing grievances. The information in this guide is based on DOC's Grievance Program Manual and cites to relevant sections within the Manual. Please note, this is an abbreviated overview of the Manual and does not cover all of its content; for further details, please review the full Manual.

DETERMINE WHETHER YOUR ISSUE IS GRIEVABLE

Certain issues cannot be grieved.¹ Sometimes this is because there is a separate process for addressing the problem. Since there can be time limits for accessing these processes, it is important to know if the grievance program is appropriate for your issue as early as possible. For a list of which issues are and are not grievable, read pages 9 through 11 of the Grievance Program Manual.

GENERAL TIPS

Grievances should be simple, accurate, and address a single issue. A grievance must fit in the designated sections of the grievance form.² In general, grievances should include the following elements under the complaint section of the grievance form:

- A brief description of the issue: *What is the problem? When and where did it happen? Who is involved (including witnesses)?*
- An explanation of how you are personally affected: *How does this problem hurt you?*
- A statement of the steps you have already taken to try to resolve the problem: *Whom did you talk to about the problem? When did you talk to them? How did they respond?*

Additionally, if you believe there was a violation of DOC policy, it may be helpful to point to that policy in your grievance. Sometimes, you may have a specific solution or remedy in mind.³ You can propose this solution on the grievance form under the suggested remedy section. This is not a required element of a grievance.

EXAMPLE

Below is an example of a grievance where the writer has included all of the above information.

Complaint:

Sergeant Smith took away my walking cane on 12/2/2017 while I was in the dayroom with fellow inmate Johnson around 3 PM. I have a current HSR for a cane due to my medical

¹ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 9-11.

² See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 14.

³ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 22.

condition. I showed the Sergeant my HSR but he told me I looked fine enough to walk without it. I kited CUS Mathews on 12/3/2017 about the problem but he never responded.

Suggested remedy:

I would like my cane back and for the Sergeant and CUS to have a better understanding of DOC Policy 690.400, Offenders with Disabilities.

REWRITES

The Grievance Coordinator may direct you to rewrite your grievance for a number of reasons.⁴ Be sure to answer all of the Grievance Coordinator’s questions and submit your rewrite within five working days of receiving this response from the Grievance Coordinator.⁵

APPEALS

Grievance decisions can be appealed at level 0, level 1, and level 2.⁶ When filing an appeal, check the appeal box and include the log ID number on the grievance form. Only discuss the same single issue that was addressed in the original grievance. You can provide additional information, but you cannot raise new issues. It is preferable to include a reason for the appeal, but it is not required.

EXHAUSTION

In general, you must “exhaust” (use up) all of the available prison grievance procedures before you can take your complaint to court. Your timely participation in the grievance process and full cooperation in an investigation may impact your ability to take legal action on the same issue in the future.⁷ If you exhaust all three levels of the grievance process, you may want to file a complaint with the DOC Ombuds. This is not a necessary step in the exhaustion process for the purposes of starting litigation.¹⁰ Also, although it is encouraged by DOC, you do not have to exhaust the grievance process before filing a tort (harm to you or your personal property) claim with Department of Enterprise Risk Management Division.⁸ You can get a tort claim from the Tort Claim Manager.⁹

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the grievance process, see the enclosed Offender Grievance Program Manual.

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⁴ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 16.

⁵ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 20.

⁶ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 22.

⁷ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 17.

⁸ See DOC Offender Grievance Program Manual, page 23.

⁹ See DOC Policy 120.500, Tort Claims, pages 2-3.

¹⁰ See DOC Policy 140.500, Ombuds, page 3.