Describing Your Limitations: Weak vs. Strong Examples

Why This Matters

Social Security does not evaluate your application based on your diagnosis alone. It evaluates how your condition affects your ability to work and function in daily life. That means the words you choose matter.

This worksheet is designed to help you practice describing your own daily challenges with the kind of specific, honest detail that helps reviewers understand your circumstances.

What You Need to Know

Compare these examples:

Weaker Statement	Stronger Statement
I have trouble at work.	I forget important meetings even when they're on my calendar, and I need repeated reminders to complete assignments.
I have memory problems.	I missed a doctor's appointment last month because I forgot to write it down, and I've started needing my spouse to confirm plans with me the day before.
I get confused sometimes.	I became lost driving to a grocery store I've visited for years and had to call my daughter to help me find my way home.
I need help with bills.	I paid the same bill twice and missed another entirely; my spouse now reviews all our accounts with me each week.
I have trouble concentrating.	I become overwhelmed when more than one task is asked of me at once, and I make mistakes on familiar tasks I've done for years.

Take Action

Use the space below (or your symptom journal) to write your own examples. For each one, try to answer: What happened? When did it happen? What was the effect?

- Example 1: _____
- Example 2: _____
- Example 3: _____
- Example 4: _____
- Example 5: _____

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Did I describe what actually happened, not just how I felt about it?
- Would someone who has never met me understand the effect this had on my day?
- Is this example honest — neither minimized nor exaggerated?

Helpful Tips

- Keep a running symptom journal so you have several real examples to choose from.
- Ask a family member or care partner what changes they've noticed — they may remember things you don't.
- Being specific does not mean focusing only on loss. You are still the same person — this is simply the information Social Security's process requires.

Things to Consider

- Every situation is different.
- You may want to discuss this with your family, care partner, or trusted advisor.
- Seek additional advice from a qualified professional if you have questions about how to complete your application.

Quick Reference

Strong examples answer three questions: What happened? When did it happen? What was the effect on your daily life or ability to work?

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