

DCSA is committed to increasing the efficiency of the security clearance investigation process.

This guide provides recommendations and tips for areas of the SF-86 questionnaire that are often misunderstood, overlooked, and/or filled out incorrectly.

COMMON SF-86 ERRORS AND MISTAKES

TIPS FOR A MORE EFFICIENT BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION

INTRO	GENERAL QUESTIONS	If you've previously completed a background investigation questionnaire, make sure the information in the system is updated by deleting any old or irrelevant entries. This includes removing residences and employments over 10 years old and/or fixing any mistakes from previous investigations. Remember to update the addresses and phone numbers of relatives and "people who know you well."
1-7	IDENTIFYING & CONTACT INFORMATION	Include all full names, aliases, and nicknames you've ever gone by and the period of time you used them. This includes your maiden name, name(s) in a former marriage, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you have only initials in your name(s), provide them and indicate "initial only." If you do not have a middle name(s), indicate "no middle name" (or NMN).• If you are a "Jr.," "Sr.," etc. enter this under "suffix."
8-10	PASSPORT AND CITIZENSHIP	List passport information, even if expired. For naturalized citizens and legal aliens, you'll need your naturalization/immigration paperwork.
11	RESIDENTIAL HISTORY	List the places where you have lived, beginning with your present residence, working back 10 years. Do not list residences before your 18 th birthday, unless to provide a minimum of two years of residence history. Residences for the entire period must be accounted for without breaks. This means that if you split your time between multiple locations during a time period, you should list all residences. Note: List the addresses of your physical location, not home of record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stationed on a ship? List the ship homeport address.• Deployed overseas? Provide the country and FPO/APO address.• Away at college? List the dorm, apartment, or relative's address where you lived during the semesters. You are not required to list temporary locations of less than 90 days that did not serve as your permanent or mailing address. For any address in the last three years, a verifier must have been to the residence. The best verifiers are neighbors, roommates, and landlords — spouses do not count.
12	EDUCATION	List any and ALL school attendances in the last 10 years (except for certificate programs) regardless of whether or not you earned a diploma/degree. Indicate if the school was attended online. List any degrees/diplomas earned more than 10 years ago. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not list education before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of education history.• Do not list military training, including MOS school, basic training, Navy "A" school, etc.



13	EMPLOYMENT	<p>List all employment history, in full, without ANY breaks for the last 10 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not stretch employment dates to fill gaps when you were unemployed.• No job is too short or insignificant to list.• Include unpaid internships, summer work, and “under the table” jobs.• Do not list tentative or future employments. <p>Military Service: For service members, <i>do not</i> list military services as one entry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List each military duty station as separate entries. Be sure to include the physical address, to include if you were stationed or deployed overseas.• Reserve/National Guard Service should be listed in the employment section.• Avoid the use of acronyms/abbreviations. <p>Terminations: Whether or not you agree, if the employer would say that you were fired, terminated, or left under unfavorable circumstances, list and explain. This includes any disciplines, warnings, reprimands, etc.</p>
14	SELECTIVE SERVICE RECORD	<p>If you were a male born after December 31, 1959, you were required to register with the Selective Service on your 18th birthday.</p> <p>If you are already in the military and did not register, list the Selective Service Number you have been issued.</p> <p>Note: Selective Service Number is not your Social Security Number.</p>
15	MILITARY HISTORY	<p>In the last seven years, list if you have been subject to court martial or other disciplinary procedure under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), such as Article 15, Captain's Mast, Article 135 Court of Inquiry, etc.</p> <p>Remember to list any overseas deployments or duty stations as their own separate entry.</p>
16	PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU WELL	<p>List three people you socialize with (preferably in the U.S.) that completely cover the last seven years. Please do not list coworkers (unless you have regular social contact outside of work) nor family members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note: Anyone listed elsewhere on the SF-86 (like spouses, ex-spouse(s), or other relatives) should not be listed in this section.
17	MARITAL/RELATIONSHIP STATUS	<p>Provide your current marital/relationship status if it's a legally recognized union, domestic partner, or a civil marriage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ex-spouses should also be listed. Provide up-to-date contact information, and the zip code and city of the courthouse in which the divorce was granted.• Do not list roommates or other members of the household unless they meet the spouse-like criteria.
18	RELATIVES	<p>List required relatives to include children (foster/adopted or stepchildren), foster parent, mother, father, siblings, stepsiblings, half-siblings, stepparents, and your in-laws — whether they are living or deceased.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include applicable relatives you have never met or do not know.• If you have any relatives that are naturalized U.S. citizens or legal aliens, provide information from their immigration/naturalization documents (naturalization certificate number, date, location, date, and location of entry into the U.S.).



19	FOREIGN CONTACTS	<p>List ALL contacts who meet the criteria within the last seven years, even if they've since become U.S. citizens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Include friends with frequent and even infrequent contact if it's close and/or continuing.Remember that extended family with whom you have or had close and/or continuing contact with in the last seven years and to whom you are bound to in some way should be listed under Section 18: Relatives.Include close foreign associations of your spouse, domestic partner, or cohabitant if you have had close and/or continuing contact with them in the last seven years.<i>Do not</i> omit a foreign contact because some information is unknown. <p>Service Members: Any foreign associations that are strictly professional and limited to military-related duties do not need to be listed; however, if contact was also social in nature, they must be listed.</p>
20A	FOREIGN ACTIVITIES	<p>List whether you, your spouse or legally recognized partner, cohabitant, or dependent children, EVER had any foreign financial interests (such as stocks, property, investments, bank accounts, etc.) in which you or they have direct control or direct ownership. Note: This question is NOT limited to the last seven years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">International mutual funds and investments that are publicly traded in a U.S. exchange do not need to be listed. But if you or your spouse opened an account with a <i>foreign bank</i> (not a U.S. bank) while overseas to pay the bills, the account should be reported.
20C	FOREIGN TRAVEL	<p>List all vacations outside the U.S. in the last seven years, even day trips to Canada or Mexico.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">List all work travel outside the U.S. that is not on official government business.If stationed abroad, list all personal travel to other countries during that time period.
21	PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH	<p>Mental health treatment and counseling, in and of itself, is not a reason to revoke or deny a clearance. Seeking or receiving mental health care for personal wellness and recovery may contribute favorably to decisions about your eligibility or continuous evaluation.</p> <p>Reportable mental health issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Legal findings of mental incompetenceCourt-ordered mental health careIn-patient mental health careCertain diagnoses which, by their very nature, may impair judgment or reliabilitySelf-appraised mental health concerns that could impact judgment or reliability



22	POLICE RECORDS	<p>For this section, report information regardless of whether the record in your case has been sealed, expunged, or otherwise stricken from the court record, or the charge was dismissed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the difference in timeframes. Make sure you know when it's asking you to self-report offenses from seven years ago to ever.• Traffic violations resulting in fines of less than \$300 do not need to be listed unless related to drugs or alcohol.
23	DRUG ACTIVITY	<p>In the last seven years, have you illegally used drugs and/or controlled substances, or misused prescription drugs? Report it. Even if marijuana is "legal" where you live or where you have traveled or visited to, federal employment follows federal law, meaning that the possession or use of marijuana is a criminal offense.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counseling: Any counseling for drug use, whether illegal, prescription, over the counter, etc., needs to be listed.
24	USE OF ALCOHOL	<p>Any counseling for alcohol dependence or abuse needs to be listed, whether or not you have had any legal issues with alcohol.</p>
25	INVESTIGATIONS/ CLEARANCES	<p>ALL prior investigations and clearances must be listed, not just the most recent one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any denied, suspended, or revoked clearances or access authorizations must be listed — even if you do not agree with it, if it was a mistake, or it was mitigated and reinstated.
26	FINANCES	<p>In addition to listing them on the SF-86, applicants should bring any paperwork regarding financial delinquencies (including bankruptcy, alimony, gambling debts, foreclosures, a lien against your property, federal debt, eviction, etc.) from the last seven years to the investigation interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Even if the issue has been resolved and/or a settlement has been arranged.• Even if it was a company's mistake and you are protesting it.• Even if your roommate, spouse, etc. was responsible for the debt(s), if you are named as the primary, cosigner, etc., you'll need to list .• Even if the insurance company was supposed to pay it and/or you are in dispute with the provider or insurer.
27	USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	<p>This section asks about your use of information technology systems from the last seven years. Information technology systems include all related computer hardware, software, firmware, and data used for the communication, transmission, processing, manipulation, storage, or protection of information. This can range from accidentally bringing a phone into a SCIF, plugging your phone into your government provided laptop, to unauthorized access to company accounts.</p>
28	NON-CRIMINAL COURT ACTIVITY	<p>If you've been a party to any public record civil court action in the last 10 years and it's not listed elsewhere on this form, list it here. This includes being sued or if you filed a claim against someone else.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being a witness in someone else's case does not need to be listed, nor do class action lawsuits for defective consumer products.