

CAGE Documentation Cheat Sheet

Reviewed by the BastionGPT Clinical Advisory Board · September 2026 · Reproduces no questionnaire items

The CAGE is a four-item, yes-or-no alcohol screen (Ewing, JAMA, 1984) worded for lifetime experience and built to find dependence, not current risky drinking; the CAGE-AID (Brown and Rounds, 1995) asks the same four topics about alcohol or drugs, so its total is not substance-specific. Neither measures quantity or frequency, neither diagnoses, and neither is the routine screen the USPSTF, NIAAA, or RACGP now name. Defensible charting names the version, states the time frame asked, records the item-level answers, adds current use, and documents the follow-up and intervention.

Version: CAGE or CAGE-AID different authors, rights, conventions

Do: write CAGE (alcohol only) or CAGE-AID (alcohol or drugs), and the substance behind each CAGE-AID yes.

Pitfall: "CAGE 2/4" when the CAGE-AID was used; a CAGE-AID total copied into the problem list as an alcohol result.

Time frame actually asked lifetime as worded, or a modified window

Do: write "lifetime frame" or "modified, past 12 months"; date resolved positives and add a current-status line.

Pitfall: a lifetime positive in a patient sober for years, read by the next clinician as current drinking.

Item-level answers, then the total C, A, G, E, in order

Do: record all four answers with the total; keep the patient's explanation beside any yes; follow up a single yes.

Pitfall: "CAGE positive" or a bare number with no item pattern, which cannot be interpreted or reproduced.

Current use, on its own line the CAGE has no consumption item

Do: drinks per typical week, heavy days, last drink, any drug use with route and frequency, in the patient's words.

Pitfall: a positive screen with no consumption statement, so present risk cannot be told from remote history.

A screen, in a named population not a diagnosis; no severity bands exist

Do: state the convention used and "diagnosis not established"; note older-adult, women, pregnancy, or translation caveats.

Pitfall: "CAGE 3/4, alcohol use disorder" with no criteria assessed; "negative, no concerns" in an older daily drinker.

Follow-up assessment triggered what happened because of the result

Do: name the next step and its result: AUDIT-C or AUDIT, DAST-10 for a drug yes, DSM-5 criteria, withdrawal check if indicated.

Pitfall: a positive CAGE with nothing after it, or a diagnosis inferred from the screen alone.

Intervention, minutes, and record what supports the claim

Do: feedback given, the patient's goal, referral made or declined, face-to-face minutes; state where the result is stored.

Pitfall: "counseled" with no content, goal, or minutes; a Part 2 program result filed as an ordinary record.

Before the note is signed

- ☐ Version named: CAGE or CAGE-AID
- ☐ Time frame stated as asked
- ☐ Item-level answers recorded, then the total
- ☐ Current quantity and frequency charted separately
- ☐ Result labeled a screen, not a diagnosis
- ☐ Follow-up instrument or assessment named
- ☐ Intervention, minutes, and referral documented

Drafting with AI

Give it the facts: version, time frame as asked, the four item-level answers, current drinks per week and heavy days, any drug use, the follow-up instrument and its result, the intervention and its minutes, and where the result is stored.

"Draft CAGE documentation: original alcohol-only version, lifetime frame, self-completed on intake 09/14; C yes, A no, G yes, E no; both current; 16 to 20 drinks a week; AUDIT-C done, positive; brief intervention 18 minutes, goal set, referral declined; claim 99408."

Never paste patient-identifying information into consumer AI tools. BastionGPT is HIPAA-compliant with a signed BAA on every plan.

4 yes/no items

lifetime wording, alcohol only

CAGE-AID differs

alcohol or drugs; own convention

Screen, not diagnosis

no severity bands exist

Not the routine screen

guidance names the AUDIT-C

CAGE Documentation Template

Copy or print for your practice · Adapt fields to your organization's, payer's and jurisdiction's documentation requirements. Contains no questionnaire items.

Setting: _____ Patient (initials): _____ Date: _____ Clinician: _____

Version (CAGE / CAGE-AID) + time frame asked: _____ Mode (verbal / self-completed) + language: _____

Screen result

C ____ · A ____ · G ____ · E ____ · total ____ of 4 · positive or negative under the convention named · patient's explanation of each yes

Current use, stated by the patient

Drinks per typical week · heavy-drinking days · last drink · drug use with route and frequency · or none, with the date last used

Interpretation

A screen, not a diagnosis · convention used · population caveat: older adult, women, pregnancy, translation · lifetime positives dated

Follow-up assessment triggered

AUDIT-C or AUDIT · DAST-10 or TAPS for a drug yes · DSM-5 criteria · withdrawal assessment if indicated · result and date

Brief intervention or referral

Feedback given · patient's goal · referral made, declined, or not indicated · safety issues addressed · face-to-face time in minutes

Plan and follow-up

Re-screen instrument and date · treatment, counseling, or medication discussion · labs ordered · next visit

Record and billing

Code claimed (bare number) · where the result is stored · Part 2 status if created by a Part 2 program · consent on file

Clinician (name and credentials): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____