

GAF Documentation Cheat Sheet

Reviewed by the BastionGPT Clinical Advisory Board · September 2026 · Reproduces no APA anchor text

The GAF is a clinician-rated 1 to 100 global rating of psychiatric symptom severity and functioning from DSM-IV-TR (2000), dropped from DSM-5 in 2013, yet still demanded by some payer forms, state systems, legacy EHR fields, and disability or court files. It is copyrighted by the American Psychiatric Association, was never normed, and shows only moderate rater agreement in routine practice. Defensible charting names the edition frame and the reason for the entry, states the period rated, discloses which component drove the number, gives the supporting facts, and pairs it with a current functional measure.

Edition frame and reason why a retired scale is being rated

Do: write per DSM-IV-TR conventions, removed from DSM-5 (2013), and name the form, field, or order that requires the entry.

Pitfall: a bare "GAF: 55" in a 2026 note, read by the next reader as a current DSM measure.

Period rated current, past week, or past month

Do: state the window; record any highest-in-past-year value separately under its own label; never rate a period you did not examine.

Pitfall: current and past-year values mixed in one field, or a retrospective number for an unexamined period.

Basis: symptoms or functioning the lower component governs

Do: say which side drove the number: symptoms, functioning, or both in the same band; never average; name any split or modified version.

Pitfall: severe symptoms and an intact job averaged into the middle of the scale with no explanation.

Supporting facts, one sentence what a reviewer can weigh

Do: work or school, self-care, relationships, psychosis, cognition, suicidal ideation with the risk assessment referenced; exclude physical and environmental limits.

Pitfall: a number with no facts, or an orthopedic or housing limitation pulling the psychiatric rating down.

The number itself one integer, in your own words

Do: enter one value, not a range; describe the level in original words; attach no level-of-care claim unless a named policy sets it.

Pitfall: "GAF 45 to 50," or "GAF 48, meets intensive outpatient criteria" with no policy behind it.

Companion current measure WHODAS 2.0 or the system's instrument

Do: record a dated current measure beside it (WHODAS 2.0, ANSA, CANS, LOCUS, HoNOS) and state that no conversion between scales was made.

Pitfall: a WHODAS profile translated into a GAF, or the two charted as one trend line.

Historical scores and change dated opinions, not a trend line

Do: carry prior GAFs forward with date, rater, and period; describe change in the facts; never read two raters' numbers as response.

Pitfall: "improved from 42 to 55" across two raters, or a 2011 score re-entered as current.

Before the note is signed

- ☐ Edition frame and reason for entry stated
- ☐ Period rated named, past-year value separate
- ☐ Driving component disclosed, never averaged
- ☐ Supporting facts given in one sentence
- ☐ Single integer, no range, no threshold claim
- ☐ Companion functional measure recorded, no conversion
- ☐ Prior scores kept as dated opinions

Drafting with AI

Give it the facts: the form or field that requires the number, the period rated, the symptom picture, the functional facts, the risk assessment reference, the companion measure and its result, and any prior scores with their dates and raters.

"Draft a legacy GAF entry: state Medicaid continued-stay form requires Axis V; rated today 09/10; symptoms limiting (persistent low mood, passive death thoughts, risk assessed separately), part-time work kept, lives alone; WHODAS 2.0 12-item done today; intake GAF 42 on 08/18 by another rater."

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

1 to 100

ten bands, lower component governs

Retired 2013

DSM-5 dropped Axis V

Still requested

some payers, states, courts, EHRs

APA copyright

paraphrase, never reproduce anchors

GAF Documentation Template

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

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

Edition frame + reason for entry: _____ Period rated: _____

Basis of the rating

Symptom severity, functioning, or both in the same band · the lower component governs · never an average

Supporting observations

Work or school · self-care and living situation · relationships · psychotic symptoms · cognition · suicidal ideation with risk assessment referenced · physical and environmental limits excluded

GAF value entered

One integer, 1 to 100 · 0 only for inadequate information · split, modified, MIRECC, or CGAS version named if used · never a range

Companion current measure

WHODAS 2.0, ANSA, CANS, LOCUS, HoNOS, or K10 · version and date · summary result · no numerical conversion between scales

Historical scores

Prior GAF values with date, rater, and period rated · kept as dated opinions · change described in the facts, not the numbers

Limits statement

Entered because the form, field, or order requires it · not a current DSM-5-TR measure · not normed · weigh with the narrative and the companion result

Plan and record

Next review date · where the GAF and the companion measure are stored · authorization or report the entry supports

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