# PHQ-9 Documentation Cheat Sheet

Reviewed by the BastionGPT Clinical Advisory Board · August 2026

**The PHQ-9** is a nine-item, public-domain depression severity measure scored 0 to 27 over the past two weeks. The score is a screen and a severity trend, never a stand-alone diagnosis, and item 9 is a safety flag that starts a direct inquiry, not a completed suicide-risk assessment.

**Form, mode, and language** name the exact instrument
**Do:** record PHQ-9 vs PHQ-2 vs PHQ-8 vs teen version, plus mode (paper, portal, interview) and language.
**Pitfall:** "PHQ positive" with no form named; denominators and safety content differ across the family.

**Total and severity band** always over 27
**Do:** write the fraction and band: 0-4 minimal, 5-9 mild, 10-14 moderate, 15-19 moderately severe, 20-27 severe.
**Pitfall:** "14/30" totals; the functional item is unscored and never joins the arithmetic.

**Item 9, separately, every time** flag, not verdict
**Do:** record the 0-3 answer even at zero; any nonzero response gets a same-visit inquiry, risk formulation, and disposition.
**Pitfall:** reflex ED referral for any endorsement, or a zero cited as the reason risk inquiry stopped.

**Functional interference** unscored, still recorded
**Do:** record the patient's answer (not difficult through extremely difficult) beside the total.
**Pitfall:** dropping it; it is the instrument's only direct read on impairment.

**Prior score and change** points and percent
**Do:** name the baseline and date, then both numbers; about six points clears measurement error, 50% is response, below 5 is remission.
**Pitfall:** the five-point reflex, or "improved" with no baseline named.

**Interpretation sentence** screen, not diagnosis
**Do:** state the result as a severity screen in clinical context; after the interview, "consistent with" is the defensible verb.
**Pitfall:** promoting a band to a diagnosis; "moderate depressive symptom severity" is the accurate phrase.

**Plan linkage and next measurement** no orphaned scores
**Do:** state what continues or changes because of the result, and date the next administration by treatment phase.
**Pitfall:** a score with no plan sentence; it documents administration, not care.

## Before the note is signed

- [ ] Exact form named, not just "PHQ"
- [ ] Language and administration mode recorded
- [ ] Total written over 27 with the published band
- [ ] Item 9 recorded; any nonzero assessed same visit
- [ ] Functional item recorded, kept out of the total
- [ ] Change stated in points and percent vs named baseline
- [ ] Plan linkage and next measurement date written

## Drafting with AI

Give it the score facts: form, total, item 9, functional answer, prior score and date, and the plan decision.

*"Draft PHQ-9 documentation: 14/27 by portal today, item 9 = 1, prior 20/27 four weeks ago, continuing weekly therapy, prescriber review next week."*

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

| 0 to 27 | 2 to 6 chart lines | Under 3 minutes | Public domain |
|---|---|---|---|
| five severity bands | typical documentation | patient completion | free to reproduce |

# PHQ-9 Documentation Template

Copy or print for your practice · Adapt fields to your organization's, payer's and jurisdiction's documentation requirements.

Practice/clinic: | Patient (initials): | Date administered:

Form: PHQ-9 / PHQ-8 / teen version: | Language: | Mode: paper / portal / interview:

**Score**
Total ___/27 · severity band: minimal, mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe · notable individual items

**Item 9 response and same-visit follow-up**
Response 0-3, recorded even at zero · if nonzero: passive vs active ideation, plan, intent, preparatory behavior, history, protective factors · risk formulation with reasoning · proportionate disposition · safety plan updated

**Functional interference (unscored)**
Patient's answer: not difficult / somewhat / very / extremely difficult · kept out of the total

**Prior score and change**
Baseline score and date · change in points and percent · construct claimed: beyond measurement error (about six points) / response at 50% / remission below 5

**Interpretation**
Severity screen result in clinical context · screen, not a stand-alone diagnosis · discrepancies with presentation explained

**Plan linkage and next measurement**
What continues, changes, or is deferred and why · next administration date and reason · registry or quality program this result feeds

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