

Return-to-Work Letter Cheat Sheet

Reviewed by the BastionGPT Clinical Advisory Board · August 2026

A return-to-work letter is a short, signed statement from a treating clinician telling an employer when an employee can resume work and under what functional restrictions or accommodations. Therapists, psychologists, and social workers write one after a mental health leave or to support an accommodation request; most run under one page, and the strongest describe function, not diagnosis.

Date, recipient, and your credentials who you are and how the letter travels

Do: date, client, your license and credentials, nature and length of the treatment relationship; pick the route: via the client, or direct with signed authorization.

Pitfall: mailing it to HR yourself as a courtesy; without a valid authorization, the courtesy is an unauthorized disclosure.

Present capacity and return date the sentence the employer is waiting for

Do: whether the client can return, on what date, to full or modified duties, anchored to your most recent assessment date.

Pitfall: "medically cleared"; no regulation requires the phrase, and it can overstate what a therapist assessed.

Functional limitations function, not symptoms or diagnosis

Do: what the condition limits at work: sustained concentration, schedule tolerance, interaction demands.

Pitfall: naming the diagnosis by default; EEOC and Ontario guidance point documentation at limitations instead.

Restrictions and graded-return schedule dated steps HR can implement

Do: dated weeks, hours per day, tasks included and excluded; give every step a start date and an end date.

Pitfall: "light duties" and "reduced stress"; four-hour days through August 28 is schedulable, adjectives are not.

Accommodations, each tied to a limitation the connection makes it sufficient

Do: recommend the change, name the limitation it addresses, and leave room for alternatives.

Pitfall: presenting one accommodation as the only option; the employer may choose any effective accommodation.

Duration, review date, basis, and signature what keeps temporary temporary

Do: how long restrictions run and when you will review; state what the opinion rests on; sign and date.

Pitfall: self-report presented as verified fact; label fact, client report, and opinion separately.

Before you send

- ☐ No diagnosis in the letter; function carries the request
- ☐ Return date and every graded step dated, with hours
- ☐ Each accommodation tied to the limitation it addresses
- ☐ Alternatives left open to the employer
- ☐ Client report labeled as report, not verified fact
- ☐ Authorization, review date, signature, and date present

Drafting with AI

Bring a few bullets or a dictation; convention fixes the order: capacity and return date first, then functional limitations, restrictions, accommodations, and the review date.

"Draft a return-to-work letter for HR: graded four-week return starting 08/17, half days weeks one and two, two accommodations tied to concentration and schedule tolerance, no diagnosis disclosed: ..."

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

150 to 400 words
under one page

15 to 30 min by hand
clinical team estimate

Function, not diagnosis
minimum disclosure

Employer or HR
usually via the client

Return-to-Work & Accommodation Letter Template

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

Date: _____ Re (client / employee): _____

From (treating clinician): _____ License / credentials: _____

Practice contact (address, phone, email): _____

Route: ☐ given to client to submit ☐ sent directly; authorization dated: _____

Treatment relationship

Nature and length of the treatment relationship (diagnosis usually not required for an accommodation request)

Present capacity and return date

Full or modified duties (anchor to the date of your most recent assessment)

Functional limitations

Work-relevant function, not symptoms (concentration, schedule tolerance, interaction demands)

Restrictions and graded-return schedule

Dated steps HR can implement (hours per day, tasks included and excluded)

Weeks 1-2: _____

Weeks 3-4: _____

Full duties from: _____

Recommended accommodations

Tie each to the limitation it addresses (other effective options remain open to the employer)

Accommodation 1: _____

Accommodation 2: _____

Duration and review date: _____

Basis and scope

Sessions and measures; job description reviewed? (client-reported information labeled as such)

Signature: _____ Date signed: _____

Name / credentials: _____