LESSON 9

Learn From a Sample Pardon Application

Imagine someone reviewing your application years after your conviction. The court record can tell that person what happened in the case. What would help them understand how you've lived since then? A dated record of a responsibility you took on, a decision you made, or a commitment you kept can give a reader something specific to consider.

In Lesson 8, Daniel asked for a shorter prison term. Here, Elias Ward asks for a pardon after completing his sentence. Elias, the people who wrote for him, and all the events in his packet are fictional. The examples on these pages give you enough information to work through the lesson on paper.

Start with two questions.

- Why might I seek a pardon, and what would I hope could change?
- Which experience would help someone understand how I've lived since my conviction?

Explain why you're asking for a pardon

Elias asks the President for forgiveness for his federal wire-fraud conviction. He also explains that a prospective employer declined to proceed after a background review in 2022. He hopes a pardon could help him explain his history when he pursues other work. The employers he approaches will make their own hiring decisions.

In his account of the offense, Elias explains that he knowingly sent false invoices for work he hadn't completed. The customer lost money and had to spend time identifying the discrepancies. Elias also reports completing restitution in December 2025. A payment history could confirm when he met that obligation. His own explanation can help a reader understand what he takes responsibility for and which choices he has made since.

Pause and write.

- What would you want a reader to understand about why you might seek a pardon? Which part of your explanation could a record help clarify?

Read Elias's complete sample pardon application

Appendix B starts on page 67. The three primary-reference testimonials appear on pages 98–99.

Pair each detail with a source

The pardon form asks separately about your reasons for applying, the case, and your life since the conviction. Use the guide below to see how the same application can draw on different sources.

Detail in Elias's application	Where it belongs	What could support it
A prospective employer stopped considering him after a background review.	Section B. Reasons for seeking pardon.	An employer's letter or a dated account of what happened.
He completed restitution in December 2025.	Sections I and J. Financial information and case background.	A payment history showing the amounts and dates.
He changed how he taught after a participant gave him feedback.	Section C. Community activities.	His dated journal describing the feedback and the revised session.
He continued working in facilities maintenance after release.	Section G. Employment history.	An employment record or a supervisor's firsthand account of his work.
A former participant describes how Elias followed up after release.	Section M. Letters of support.	The participant's signed letter describing conversations and actions he remembers.

Adapted from Prison Professors, "Sample Pardon Application," November 2026, Sections B, C, G, I and J, Continuations A–C, and letters M1–M3.

Pause and write.

- Choose one detail you might include. Where would a reader look to confirm it, and what would you still need to explain yourself?

Describe your contribution and give others credit for their work

In August 2021, a participant told Elias that a teaching example didn't fit his circumstances. Elias recorded the feedback in his journal. For the next session, he prepared several options and asked people to explain which one they would use. The date and the change he made tell the reader how he responded to feedback.

In the fictional packet, Elias reached 56 people through small groups and individual conversations in prison. After release, he stayed in touch with eight. Seven told him they were working. Three of those seven wrote the sample letters. Those numbers describe different things. One counts the people Elias reached, another counts the people who stayed in touch, and another records what some of them later reported. Each participant can explain the steps he took to find and keep work.

Pause and write.

- Think of a time you helped someone work toward a goal. How would you describe your part and leave room for the other person to describe their own decisions?

Ask for letters based on firsthand experience

Marcus Vale writes that Elias helped him choose one decision to reflect on each week. After Marcus started a warehouse job, he told Elias that he struggled to arrive on time. Marcus describes what he did next. He began arranging transportation the night before and spoke with his supervisor when he needed help. The letter gives a reader both a specific example of Elias's follow-up and Marcus's account of his own response.

Andrew Pierce describes how Elias asked him to apply an idea from a book report to his goal of working in maintenance. James Bell recalls how Elias helped him use a weekly schedule as a starting point for balancing work and family. Each writer explains how he knows Elias and gives an example from that relationship.

As you saw in Lesson 6, the pardon form asks you to identify exactly three primary references. They must be unrelated to you by blood or marriage, sign their letters, and be willing to speak with an investigator. The letters in this sample illustrate what firsthand accounts can cover.

Pause and write.

- Who knows you through a responsibility you've held over time? What specific experience could that person describe in their own words?

Write your journal entry

Date your entry. Choose one responsibility or contribution you'd want someone to understand. Describe what you did, how you know what happened, and one step you could take this week to build on it. Set a date to come back and review your progress.

- What responsibility have I taken on, and how have I followed through over time?
- Who has seen part of that work? What could they describe from their own experience?
- What can I do in the next seven days, and what will I look for when I review the result?

In Lesson 10, you'll use an application log to connect your answers with the records you have and the information you still need.