LESSON 10

Document Your Progress as You Prepare for Clemency

If you worked on a clemency application today, could you find a record of what you were doing two years ago? You might remember a course you completed or someone you helped. A dated entry can take you back to the details, including what you wanted to accomplish, what you tried, and what you changed after you saw the result.

While I served my sentence, I earned university degrees and published work on prison and sentencing reform. When I shared that work, people had something specific to read and discuss with me. Some of those relationships became part of a coalition of support. As you look back over the work you've done in this workbook, think about which details you'd want to be able to find again.

Start with two questions.

- What have I done that I'd want to explain to a future reader?
- What could I write down today that would help me remember the details a year from now?

Record a decision while you remember it

Start in a notebook or on a sheet of paper. Put the date at the top. Give the reader enough context to understand what you were trying to do. Describe the decision you made, what happened afterward, and what you plan to do next.

In Lesson 9, Elias Ward wrote about a participant who told him a teaching example didn't fit his circumstances. Elias changed the next session and gave people more than one option to consider. If he returned to that entry a year later, he could see what prompted him to change his approach. A record that only listed the session date and attendance would answer a different question.

A journal entry, a book report, and a release plan can help you record different parts of the same effort. Use the journal to explain a decision. Use a book report to describe how you tried an idea from your reading. When the result affects your plans for work or life after prison, update your release plan to show what changed.

Pause and write.

- Which decision is still fresh in your mind? What would you want to remember about it if you came back to your notes next year?

Turn an entry into a record and start your free profile

See Appendix C, pages 103–104, for a journal example and a sample letter you can adapt.

Give each open item a next action

Use an application log when you need to find records or finish answers over several weeks. Each entry can name the task, the date you acted, the record you used or requested, and the next step. A status such as planned, waiting, or done helps you see where to start when you come back. Give an open item a date to check it again.

In the fictional log below, each record has a short label. E04 points to the supervision completion record. E05 points to the release record, and E06 points to the payment ledger. You can use short labels or the full names of your documents. Choose a way to find the record again when you need it.

Task in Elias's log	Status and record	What he'll do with it
Verify release, supervision, and payment dates.	Done. Checked October 21, 2026. Records E04–E06.	Use each date in the answer that asks about it.
Record the copy used in the filing exercise.	Done. Simulated filing November 20, 2026. Copy and sending record E20–E21.	Refer back to the exact set of answers and attachments used in the exercise.
Record the confirmation and case number.	Waiting in the exercise. Review February 20, 2027. Reference E21–E22.	Check whether a confirmation has arrived at the next review.
Review new records and any contact changes.	Planned. Review December 18, 2026. Reference E22.	Identify what has changed and decide whether any information belongs in an update.

Adapted from Prison Professors, "Build Your Pardon Application Log — Elias Ward," Action Log and Evidence Index. The entries describe a fictional exercise.

Pause and write.

- Which item are you ready to put in a log? What will tell you that you've finished it, and when will you check again if it remains open?

Check what a record actually confirms

Elias's log gives him a way to check three dates that answer different questions. He left confinement in September 2021, completed supervision in September 2024, and completed the payments shown in his ledger in December 2025. Writing each date beside its source helps him avoid using one date to answer a question about another event.

In the example, the Probation Office later replies and confirms the supervision end date. Elias records the reply. The date confirmation helps him check his answer about supervision. He would need a separate statement if he wanted to say that someone in the office supported his request.

Review your own draft one answer at a time. If your memory differs from a record, note the question and check the underlying source before you settle on the wording. If you're still waiting for a letter or document, write down what remains open so you can pick up where you left off.

Pause and write.

- Which two dates or events in your own account could be easy to confuse? What source could you use to check each one?

Use the log after you finish a draft

If you decide to apply, use the government's current instructions to assemble and submit your petition. Record the date you send it and keep a copy of the answers and attachments you sent. Add any confirmation and case number when they arrive. If the Office of the Pardon Attorney asks for more information, log what it requested and when you responded.

Your notebook still has a purpose if your petition stays pending or your plans change. An entry about how you handled feedback can help you prepare for a job interview. A revised release plan can help you explain to a family member what you've arranged and what you still need to work out. Return to the record as you make decisions about the life you want to build.

Pause and write.

- Which part of the record you're building could help you with a decision about work, family, or life after prison?

Write your journal entry

Date your entry and choose one action you can take in the next seven days. Set a date to come back. At that review, write down what happened and decide what you'll do next.

- What goal am I preparing for, and why did I choose it?
- What will I do this week, and what could I record so I can explain what I learned?
- When I review this entry, what will help me decide whether to continue or change my approach?