

## BACKGROUND SECTION

- » The video that accompanies this lesson offers more insight and commentary that will help you prepare an effective narrative as part of your comprehensive mitigation strategy.
- » [https://youtu.be/5R\\_U-alywqY](https://youtu.be/5R_U-alywqY)

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- » Draft a Background section (≈1,200—1,700 words) that humanizes them without making excuses.
- » Select concrete life details (family, schooling, work, health, recovery, vivid scenes) that build credibility.
- » Use AI productively: paste prior transcript, request “Background only,” then revise for accuracy and voice.
- » Add documentation that supports mitigation and PSR accuracy (e.g., recovery history) without fabrication.

### Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you move from the Introduction to the **Background**—the longest, most detailed part of your sentencing narrative. Its purpose is to help a judge see the whole person behind the case. The instructor models a step-by-step workflow: return to the existing AI conversation containing your full transcript, ask for **Section Two—Background**, then paste the draft into your working document and **edit for authenticity**.

**What belongs in Background.** This section offers human context, not excuses. The transcript shows how to weave together: family origins (e.g., immigrant parents, trades work ethic), childhood environment, schooling, early jobs, and a **vivid scene** that shows character. The model uses sensory detail (smell of sawdust, chill of morning air, tool belt on a construction site) to place the judge in a moment that reveals values learned (or ignored). You should do the same with one short, concrete scene from your life.

**Accountability over minimization.** The revision process deliberately avoids blaming others or circumstances. Instead, the narrator identifies patterns—entitlement, shortcuts, resistance to discipline—that predated the offense. The message is candid: misconduct did not begin at arrest; it began when the person adopted habits that ignored responsibility. This framing is persuasive because it shows moral insight and self-awareness—qualities judges consistently reward.

**Health and recovery details—only if true.** The lesson demonstrates how to document the use of drugs or alcohol history. It shows how acknowledging blackouts, impaired judgment, and family warnings (when accurate) can be relevant to Bureau of Prisons programming (e.g., RDAP). If you do not memorialize your history with drugs or alcohol, you will not qualify for RDAP, even if you need the program. Many people make the mistake of thinking that revealing their history of drugs or alcohol will make them look bad in front the judge. That is not accurate. The judge will want to see personal growth, introspection, and a plan to make things better.

**How to work with AI.** Rather than accepting the AI draft at face value, you should be the master, as shown in the course’s accompanying video. Notice how in the video I:

- » (1) check word count,
- » (2) read the narrative aloud,
- » (3) correct facts (names, spellings, dates),
- » (4) replace generic phrasing with lived specifics; and
- » (5) improve transitions from the Introduction (“In the following pages...”) and toward the next section (“Influences that led to the crime”).

This paste → generate → revise loop ensures your Background sounds like you, not a template.

**Quality checklist.** A judge-ready Background is first-person, specific, and free of legal argument. It presents opportunities you had, choices you made, and lessons you’ve drawn. It shows growth by contrasting past attitudes with current insight and by previewing the concrete changes you’re making now.



By the end, you will have a credible, readable Background that anchors the rest of your narrative and prepares the judge to understand the **Influences Leading to the Crime** next.

## Key Takeaways

- » Use facts + vivid scene to humanize; avoid excuses or blame.
- » Aim for 1,200—1,700 words; be thorough but tight.
- » Read aloud and de-AI-ify: fix names/dates, replace generalities with specifics.
- » Include recovery/health details only if true; never fabricate.
- » End with a clear transition to Influences Leading to the Crime.

## Self-Directed Exercise

1. Gather specifics: List bullet points under these headings—Family & Upbringing, Schooling, Early Work, Community/Relationships, Health/Recovery (if applicable), One vivid scene (time/place/senses/action/feeling).
2. Draft with AI: Paste your transcript and prompt, “Write only the Background section (1,200—1,700 words) in my first-person voice.”
3. Revise: Read aloud. Correct facts, strengthen the vivid scene, remove clichés, and insert precise details.
4. Transition: Add 1—2 sentences that set up the next lesson (“In the next section, I explain the influences and decisions that led me to offend...”).
5. Save with a good name you can track: Narrative\_02\_Background\_v1\_YYYY-MM-DD.docx.

## Assessment Questions

1. Multiple choice: The primary purpose of the Background section is to—



- ◇ a) Argue legal issues in the case
  - ◇ b) Humanize the writer with specific life context without excuses
  - ◇ c) Critique the prosecutor’s narrative
  - ◇ d) Quote statutes and guidelines
2. Name three categories of detail that typically belong in a judge-ready Background.
  3. True/False: It is acceptable to embellish substance-use history to improve chances at RDAP.
  4. Write two sentences that could serve as a transition from Background to “Influences Leading to the Crime.”
  5. Brief answer: Why is reading the Background aloud an essential step before finalizing?

## Background — Sample from video

I was born in Anaheim, California, on January 15, 1964. My parents, Julio and Geri Santos, did not have college educations, but they worked hard to provide for our family. My father was an immigrant who trained as a journeyman electrician; he escaped from Cuba, hoping to build a better life for our family.

Over time, through discipline and persistence, my parents built a small electrical contracting company in Seattle. My mother supported him by managing the books and caring for my two sisters, Julie and Christina, and me. Together, our parents gave us a stable home and the security of a middle-class upbringing.

When I was about five years old, we moved to North Seattle. That is where my earliest clear memories begin. My father worked long hours and often brought me along to jobs on weekends. He believed strongly that learning a trade and working hard mattered more than formal education. He used to tell me, “Unless you’re going to be a doctor or a lawyer, you don’t need college. You need to know how to work.” He lived by that code, and our family never went without. We had a good home, vacations, and the appearance of comfort.



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Although my parents were hardworking and disciplined, I grew up with a sense of entitlement. Unlike my father, who knew the value of each paycheck, I took our comfortable lifestyle for granted. Looking back, I can see how that mindset set me on the wrong path. Instead of embracing discipline, I resisted it. Instead of appreciating education, I coasted through school without effort and only earned mediocre grades.

I attended St. John's Catholic School in the Greenwood neighborhood of Seattle until our move, and then Lake Forest Park Elementary, Kellogg Junior High, and Shorecrest High School. I graduated in 1982, but my academic performance was mediocre at best. I never applied myself, and I often treated school as an obligation rather than an opportunity. My grades reflected my lack of effort, and I left high school without any sense of direction.

My father hoped I would follow him into the trades. He invited me to work alongside him, but I resisted. He thrived on discipline and sacrifice, while I craved shortcuts and immediate gratification. My earliest jobs were in his business, where I was expected to learn by doing. Rather than seeing those experiences as a foundation, I dismissed them as drudgery.

One vivid memory stands out. On a Saturday morning, when most of my friends were sleeping in or planning to meet at the beach, my father woke me before dawn to go with him to a construction site. I still remember the smell of sawdust and the chill of the Seattle air as he handed me a tool belt and expected me to work alongside grown men. I was resentful, tired, and embarrassed that while my friends were free, I was hauling wire and sweeping floors. At the time, I saw it as unfair. Only much later did I understand what he was trying to teach me—that dignity comes from work, and that discipline is the foundation of a meaningful life. I squandered those lessons.

Instead of developing a strong work ethic, I gravitated toward peers who valued leisure and image over substance. By the time I reached high school, I had formed the habit of looking for ways around responsibility. I managed to graduate, but with no plan for higher education and no serious thought about a career.

My parents provided structure, but they did not push me academically. They had built a good life without college, and I absorbed their skepticism about the value of formal schooling. Combined with my immaturity, that



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skepticism became a justification for neglecting education altogether. My attitude was that hard work was optional, that opportunities would somehow present themselves. That was a dangerous illusion.

Socially, I thrived. I enjoyed going out, drinking, and being part of the scene. I began drinking in high school, believing it made me more confident and charismatic. Alcohol lowered my inhibitions, and I convinced myself that it made me the life of the party. In reality, it clouded my judgment, influenced the friends I chose, and led me to make reckless decisions. Sometimes, I drank so much that I blacked out. I ignored the warnings of family members who told me I was drinking too much. I brushed it off, insisting I was fine. Only later, in custody, did I recognize how much alcohol shaped my behavior and my poor choices.

After high school, my immaturity deepened. Without the structure of school, I drifted. I worked occasionally in my father's business but without commitment. Instead of seeking to build skills, I looked for shortcuts. My friends and I spent more time talking about fast cars and nightclubs than about education or careers. I married briefly, to a woman named Gail, during the period when I was involved in cocaine trafficking. That marriage was built on illusion—the illusion of money, status, and a fast lifestyle. It could not withstand the reality of my conduct. The marriage dissolved soon after my arrest.

By every measure, I was unprepared for adult life. I had the benefits of a good family and a secure home, but I lacked discipline, accountability, and purpose. Those deficits became the cracks through which bad influences entered.

Looking back, I can see that I had many opportunities to choose a better path. I could have pursued college, committed to learning a trade, or built on the foundation my father worked so hard to provide. Instead, I rejected those opportunities and cultivated habits of irresponsibility. I learned how to avoid hard work rather than how to embrace it.

The truth is that my criminal conduct did not begin the day I trafficked cocaine. It began years earlier, when I allowed myself to believe that rules did not apply to me, that I could take shortcuts and avoid consequences. My background shows that I was not deprived or without support. I had every chance to make better choices, but I squandered them.



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Today, I recognize how selfish and shortsighted I was. I am not proud of my academic record, my early jobs, or the way I dismissed responsibility. I am especially ashamed of the way I let down my parents. They modeled discipline and hard work, yet I treated their sacrifices as something I could waste.

By giving this background, I do not mean to shift blame. On the contrary, I want the Court to see that my failure was not due to circumstances beyond my control. It was due to my own immaturity, arrogance, and unwillingness to accept responsibility. That is what led me to crime.

This background also shows that I had the foundation to do better. My parents' example, my stable upbringing, and the opportunities I had all prove that I could have lived differently. The fact that I chose to engage in this behavior, trying to avoid problems with the law by hiring other people, makes my conduct more serious, not less. I betrayed not only society but also the values my family tried to instill in me.

As I prepare for sentencing, I carry with me the weight of that realization. My hope is that by being truthful about my background, I can show the Court that I now understand where I went wrong. The discipline I once rejected is now what I seek. The lessons I ignored are now the ones I value most. My responsibility is to make amends by living with accountability and integrity from this point forward.



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