

**OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
ATLANTA OVERSIGHT DIVISION
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Position: Computer Specialist (Systems Programming),
GS-334-11

Organization: Applications Development Division
Directorate of Information Management
[installation] Army Depot
[installation city and state]

Decision: Computer Specialist (parenthetical designation
at the discretion of the agency), GS-334-11
(Appeal denied)

OPM Decision Number: C-0334-11-01, 8/9/96

Background

On April 11, 1996, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management, accepted an appeal for the position of Computer Specialist (Systems Programming), GS-334-11, [installation]. The appellant is requesting that his position be changed to Computer Specialist (Systems Programming), GS-334-12.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

Sources of Information

This appeal decision is based on information from the following sources:

1. The appellant's letter received April 10, 1996, appealing the classification of his position.
2. The agency's letter of May 21, 1996, providing position and organizational information.
3. A telephone interview with servicing classifier, on July 1, 1996.
4. A telephone interview with the appellant on July 3, 1996.
5. A telephone interview with the appellant's supervisor, on July 3, 1996.

Position Information

The appellant is assigned to Position Number 15729. The appellant, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant develops and maintains local adaptations of standardized computer systems for mainframe, mini- and micro-computer systems at the

[installation] Army Depot and analyzes, implements, and maintains software. He conducts studies to determine user requirements in relation to availability of existing systems; analyzes system failures and devises program fixes; develops ADP applications; provides training for user personnel; and provides technical liaison and coordination in support of the depot base operations functions. The appellant serves as the senior specialist on DATACOM/DB functions, advising management and training programmers and users, as well as coordinating depot and satellite requirements with headquarters. He also serves as the depot representative and systems administrator for the Joint Engineering Data Management Information Control System (JEDMICS).

The appellant receives direction from the Chief, Applications Development Division, who indicates the overall objectives and policies of the division. The appellant performs his work independently, keeping the supervisor advised of the status of his work. Results of his work and recommendations are accepted without change. His work is reviewed in terms of the effectiveness in meeting users' needs.

Standards Referenced

Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, July 1991.

Series and Title Determination

The appellant does not contest the agency determination of his series or title.

The GS-334 series includes positions with responsibility for analyzing, managing, supervising, or performing work necessary to plan, design, develop, acquire, document, test, implement, integrate, maintain, or modify systems for solving problems or accomplishing work processes by using computers. Positions are included in this series when the primary need is knowledge of information processing methodology/technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques. The appellant provides technical expertise directly related to the design, development, implementation, and/or management of computer information systems, including hardware, software, and processing techniques. This work is properly covered by the GS-334 series. The

authorized title for nonsupervisory positions in this series is Computer Specialist. The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* provides guidance on using parenthetical titles to identify specialty areas. The descriptive parenthetical designation may be added at the discretion of the agency.

The appropriate title and series for this position is Computer Specialist (parenthetical designation at the discretion of the agency), GS-334.

Grade Determination

The appellant's position is evaluated by application of the criteria in the GS-334 standard. This standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under FES, positions are placed in grades on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required as evaluated in terms of nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions.

A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor-level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor-level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor-level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

Under FES, positions which significantly exceed the highest factor level or fail to meet the lowest factor level described in a classification standard must be evaluated by reference to the Primary Standard, contained in Appendix 3 of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards. The Primary Standard is the "standard-for-standards" for FES.

Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position:

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts; and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge. The agency credited Level 1-7. The appellant does not contest this determination.

Level 1-7 requires knowledge of a wide range of computer techniques, requirements, and methods to accomplish a variety of assignments in an application or specialty area. At this level, skill is used in applying agency policies and data processing standards to evaluate alternative approaches to solve problems, including the modification or adaptation of precedent solutions to unique or specialized requirements. Employees use knowledge and skills to analyze, evaluate, and make recommendations on major aspects of projects, such as what system interrelationships must be considered and what operating mode, system software, and/or equipment configuration is most appropriate. Typically, employees at this level develop the plans and specifications necessary to carry out recommendations and provide advisory and user assistance services.

Level 1-7 is met. The appellant is responsible for implementing application programs and program changes for standard systems designed to provide ADP support for the various functions at the [installation] Army Depot and satellite activities. He analyzes user requirements in relation to regulations, directives, and available programs and determines the need for the development of unique programs, additional equipment, system redesign, and/or other modifications. He responds to system failures, performs diagnostic tests, and devises temporary fixes. The appellant analyzes the effectiveness of operational systems and recommends changes as necessary; assures that interface requirements with various data systems are met; trains users; helps determine and coordinate changes in work flow, space, and equipment; and stays abreast of the latest developments in computer technology. These duties are similar to those illustrated at the 1-7 level in the standard.

At Level 1-8, employees apply a mastery of a specialty area or comprehensive knowledge of Federal data processing policy promulgated by Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the General Services Administration. At this level, the knowledge is used to perform a key role in very difficult assignments, such as planning advanced systems projects or leading task forces to resolve critical problems in existing systems requiring innovative solutions. Also characteristic of positions at this level are duties such as advising top management on new developments and advanced techniques; planning, organizing, and directing studies to develop long-range (e.g., 5 to 10 year) ADP forecasts and recommendations; evaluating overall plans for major ADP projects; and/or coordinating development of ADP standards, guidelines, or policy.

Level 1-8 is not met. The appellant's responsibilities are in support of the automated systems used by the [installation] Army Depot and satellite activities as opposed to the widely-dispersed and diversified activities illustrated at this level in the standard. His duties require knowledge of established technology and methods which he may adapt or modify. He participates as a team member in the analysis and administration of JEDMICS but is not responsible for leading projects of the critical or precedent-setting nature described at this level.

Level 1-7 is credited for 1250 points.

Factor 2 - Supervisory Controls:

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility for carrying out assignments, and how completed work is reviewed. The agency credited Level 2-4. The appellant believes Level 2-5 is justified.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and consults with the employee in determining time frames and resource requirements. The employee independently plans and carries out assignments, interprets policies, integrates and coordinates the work of others, and resolves most conflicts,

informing the supervisor of work progress and potentially controversial matters. At this level, the work is reviewed for feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in achieving the expected results.

Level 2-4 is met. The appellant's supervisor indicates the overall objectives and policies of the division, and the appellant independently plans, designs, and carries out his work. The appellant keeps the supervisor advised of the status of his work, normally consulting with the supervisor only when he needs additional support on labor intensive projects. The supervisor periodically reviews the appellant's work in terms of results and effectiveness in meeting users' needs.

At Level 2-5, the supervisor provides only administrative supervision, with assignments made in terms of broadly defined missions or functions. At this level, the employee functions as a technical authority, making extensive unreviewed technical judgments and decisions which lead to or form the basis for major program policy and operational decisions by top management. The results of the work are considered to be technically authoritative and are normally accepted without significant change. Work is reviewed for fulfillment of program objectives, effect on overall projects, or contributions to the advancement of technology.

Level 2-5 is not met. This level describes independent responsibility for broad programs and authoritative technical advice that may affect organizational policies or contribute to the advancement of technology. It reflects administrative supervision only with full technical authority delegated to the employee. Typically, this level of authority is accompanied by responsibility for a significant program or function. The appellant has technical responsibility for his functional assignments; however, while the supervisor does not technically review the appellant's work in DATACOM/DB or JEDMI CS, he does have ultimate responsibility for all the work performed by the Application Development Division. The JEDMI CS work does not involve extensive unreviewed decisions leading to major program policy and operational decisions by top management as described at this level. The appellant's work on JEDMI CS is performed as a team member reviewing the development and operation of a new system and providing feedback and

suggestions. The JEDMI CS project, however, is led by a program manager who reviews the feedback provided by the appellant, as well as a number of other team members. It is the program manager who has final authority for determining what design changes will be made to JEDMI CS. Although the appellant developed local uses for DATACOM/DB, the Department of Army has developed standard instructions and standard systems for DATACOM/DB and there is a limit to what can be changed on the standard systems. The appellant is the local expert but the responsibility for the overall direction of the DATACOM/DB program rests at a higher level.

Level 2-4 is credited for 450 points.

Factor 3 - Guidelines:

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used, and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency credited Level 3-4 for this factor. The appellant does not contest this determination.

At Level 3-4, the guidelines are general in nature with little specificity regarding the approach to be followed in accomplishing work. Typically, compatibility with existing systems or processes is the primary constraint. The work requires deviating from traditional methods or researching trends and patterns to develop improved methods or formulate criteria. The employee uses initiative in implementing state-of-the-art techniques and technology to develop new and improved methods. At this level, initiative and resourcefulness are demonstrated in unprecedented design efforts, integrating the work of others, or predicting future data processing environments.

Level 3-4 is met. The appellant's guidelines range from numerous to very few with limited applicability. He must be resourceful in designing modifications and improving local programs. His work requires integration with other automated systems, and he must use initiative to resolve problems within the system. He stays abreast of new technology and determines new ways to use existing software. He develops implementing instructions for local users and provides training. The unprecedented and highly technical nature of

JEDMI CS requires the appellant to be creative and look for new and improved ways to use the system. JEDMI CS is an innovative, state-of-the-art system designed to transmit technical drawings via computer. Testing the system for use at the Depot requires the appellant to develop new methods to enable the system to work in the Depot environment.

At Level 3-5, guidelines exist in the form of general agency policy, legislation, broadly stated technical objectives, or comparable guidance requiring extensive interpretation and definition. Typically, the major constraints are those imposed by the state-of-the-art computer technology. Judgment is required in areas such as developing ways to obtain data on and evaluate the significance of technological advances in a specialty area. The employee must interpret conflicting legislation and/or overall objectives, isolate areas that need development or study, and devise and plan projects to accomplish this. The employee is generally recognized throughout the agency as an expert in a specialty area.

Level 3-5 is not met. The appellant's guidelines are not in the form of general agency policy or legislation as described at this level nor is he required to interpret conflicting legislation and/or overall objectives. The appellant's guidance is contained in numerous systems manuals and similar materials which are more specific and more readily available than those described at this level. The appellant must sometimes search extensively through the manuals for guidance applicable to specific situations, and may have to deviate from normal practices to solve specific problems. He develops some systems locally based on user requirements, and the guidance used in this work is in the form of operating procedures for the work to be automated rather than systems manuals. This guidance is also more specific and more readily available than that described at this level. Consequently, the intent of Level 3-5 is not met and cannot be credited.

Level 3-4 is credited for 450 points.

Factor 4 - Complexity:

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work. The agency credited Level 4-4 for this factor. The appellant believes Level 4-5 is appropriate.

At Level 4-4, assignments are characterized by the need for substantial problem analysis and are concerned with several stages of an automation project or assignments in a specialty area which require a variety of techniques and methods. Decisions at this level involve assessing situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data and testing of different approaches. Consideration must often be given to future changes in systems design, equipment, or comparable aspects. The work requires consideration of considerable data, such as in developing programming specifications or new systems where precedents are available. Computer equipment and software at this level are available from vendors and in use in other Government or private operations.

Level 4-4 is met. Much of the appellant's work involves standard systems which he tailors for local use. He developed local uses for the DATACOM/DB system prior to Army's development of standard database uses which required him to assess needs and test different approaches to meet those needs. He explores various alternatives for retrieving the information needed by a user. Modification of systems primarily involves systems that are available from vendors and already in use in other locations. The appellant's work with the Joint Engineering Data Management Information Control System (JEDMICS) involves substantial hardware and software problem analysis and the evaluation of numerous program changes and alternatives. Since this is a new, complex system, the appellant is called upon to analyze the applicability of certain operating methods and to test different technical approaches. His analysis and feedback as a team member on this project requires that he consider probable areas of future change in systems design, equipment layout, or comparable aspects that will facilitate subsequent modifications.

At Level 4-5, assignments are characterized by the need for significant departures from established practice, such as a number of stages in an automation project or an unusual depth of analysis of system software or computer equipment. Assignments at this level involve features such as integrating facets of the work performed by others, concerns with rapidly evolving technology, and problems which have been resistant to solution in the past. Decisions at this level are complicated by the novel or obscure nature of the problems or special requirements for organization and coordination. Usually, there are conflicting requirements, the problems are poorly defined, or they require projections based on variable data or on technological developments which make project designs obsolete and require major reconsideration. Technical difficulty is exceptional, such as in developing major items of system software where numerous conditions or options must be considered or developing specifications for major segments of unprecedented applications systems.

Level 4-5 is not met. The appellant's assignments routinely require making modifications to standard programs. He uses commercial software and data processing hardware which is available from various vendors to meet requirements. While his JEDMICS work involves highly technical software, it is designed for a limited function (i.e., the transmittal and receiving of engineering data and drawings), and the appellant spends only 20 percent of his time working on this project. He serves as a team member participating in the testing and evaluation of new versions of the software and hardware. His decisions do not require him to apply many unrelated processes to a broad range of activities nor do they include major areas of unknown phenomena or uncertainty in approach, methodology, or interpretation and evaluation as expected at this level. The work does not fully meet the intent of Level 4-5.

Level 4-4 is credited for 225 points.

Factor 5 - Scope and Effect:

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, as measured by the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

The agency credited Level 5-3 for this factor. The appellant believes Level 5-4 is appropriate.

At Level 5-3, the work involves resolving a variety of conventional problems, questions, or situations, using established practices and techniques. At this level, the work affects the adequacy of such activities as field investigations, internal operations, or research conclusions, primarily at the local level.

Level 5-3 is met. The appellant's primary responsibility is to facilitate work at the [installation] Army Depot, tenant activities and related satellite offices. He works with standard systems and software, writes some programs for local use, and makes limited modifications to systems for local use. He relies primarily on established practices and techniques to deal with technical problems that are of a conventional nature, i.e., there are typically procedures to follow, he must choose which procedure applies.

At Level 5-4, the work involves investigating and analyzing a variety of unusual problems, questions, or conditions associated with a particular application or a specialty area. The work affects a wide range of activities and assignments which are typically concerned with the agency's single centralized ADP operation which is linked to terminals at numerous sites throughout the country, or standard systems to be used subsequently on numerous equipment units or at numerous installation-level ADP operations in the agency.

Level 5-4 is not met. The appellant's position does not have the scope described at this level, i.e., wide range of agency activities at numerous sites around the country, nor does his work affect the operations of other agencies. His work is primarily concerned with the application of existing technology and software to meet the data processing needs of [installation] Army Depot, tenant activities, and satellites. While the appellant's work on the JEDMICS project may require him to analyze unusual problems in a specialty area, the primary purpose of his participation on this project is to evaluate the system in terms of the Depot's particular needs. His assignments, including JEDMICS, are more limited in breadth and effect than envisioned at this level.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6 - Personal Contacts and Factor 7 - Purpose of Contacts:

These factors measure the type and purpose of face-to-face contacts and telephone dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. The level of regular and recurring personal contacts selected under Factor 6 is to be matched with the purposes of those contacts under Factor 7, and the appropriate point value credited using the chart provided in the standard. The agency credited Level 3b for these combined factors. The appellant does not contest that evaluation.

Persons Contacted

At Level 3, contacts, in addition to those within the agency, are with vendor representatives, computer personnel of other agencies, representatives of professional associations, and the like. This level may also include irregular contacts with the head of the agency and program officials several managerial levels above the employee.

Level 3 is met. The appellant regularly deals with users within the agency, as well as other computer specialists both within and outside the agency, vendors, and program managers.

At Level 4, contacts are with high-ranking officials from outside the employing agency at national or international levels in highly unstructured settings.

Level 4 is not met. The appellant does not have contact with the type of high-ranking officials at national and international levels described at this level.

Level 3 is credited for Factor 6.

Purpose of Contacts

At Level *b*, the purpose of the contacts is to coordinate work efforts, solve problems, or provide advice to managers on noncontroversial organization or program related issues and concerns.

Level *b* is met. The appellant's contacts are primarily to exchange information in order to resolve problems, coordinate work, or to provide advice and assistance.

At Level *c*, the purpose of the contacts is to influence others to utilize particular technical methods and procedures or to persuade others to cooperate in meeting objectives when, in either case, there are problems in securing cooperation.

Level *c* is not met. The appellant does not typically have to persuade others to take action nor does he regularly encounter problems gaining the cooperation of others.

Level *b* is credited for Factor 7.

Level 3b is credited for Factors 6 and 7 for 110 points.

Factor 8 - Physical Demands:

This factor measures the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee in performing the work assignment, including the agility and dexterity required, and the extent of physical exertion. The agency credited Level 8-1, and the appellant agrees.

Level 8-1 describes work which is sedentary and includes no physical demands. The appellant's work is sedentary and requires no unusual physical effort.

Level 8-1 is credited for 5 points.

Factor 9 - Work Environment:

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings, and the safety precautions required. The agency credited Level 9-1, and the appellant agrees.

Level 9-1 covers work performed in a typical office setting where no special safety precautions are required. The appellant performs his work in an office environment.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

SUMMARY		
FACTOR	LEVEL	POINTS
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory Controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-4	450
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. Personal Contacts and 7. Purpose of Contacts	6-3 7-b	110
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	TOTAL	2645

A total of 2645 points falls within the range for a GS-11, 2355 to 2750 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-334 standard.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Computer Specialist (parenthetical designation at the discretion of the agency), GS-334-11. This decision constitutes a classification certificate issued under the authority of section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This certificate is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the Government.